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Women Who Rock

FEATURING

Sharon Jones / MisterWives / Shovels & Rope
Andra Day / Nicki Bluhm & The Infamous Stringdusters
Amanda Shires / Neko Case, k.d. lang & Laura Veirs

GRACE POTTER AND BONNIE RAITT

A SWEEPING CONVERSATION WITH TWO SINGULAR VOICES

Issue 274 September 2016
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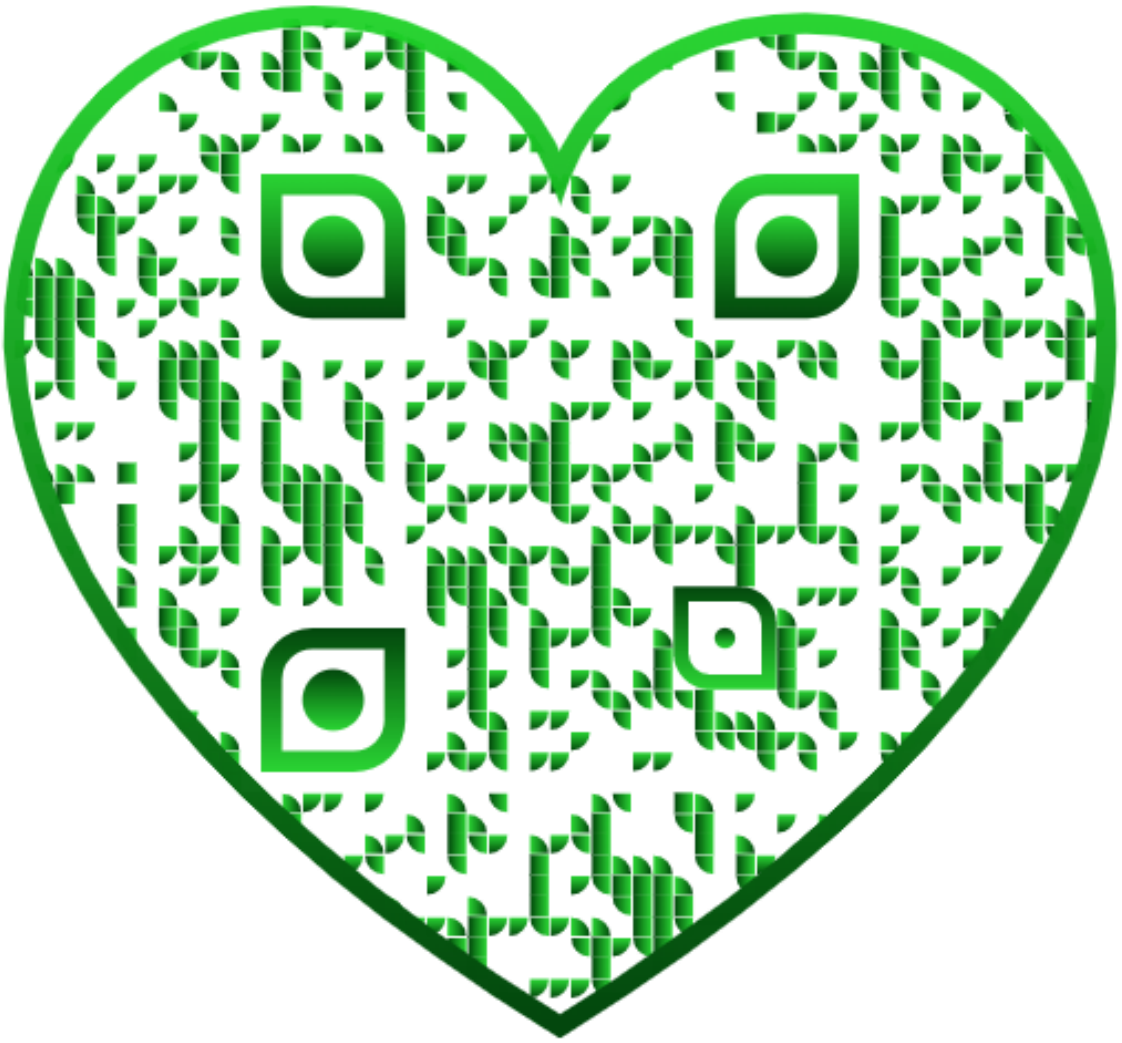

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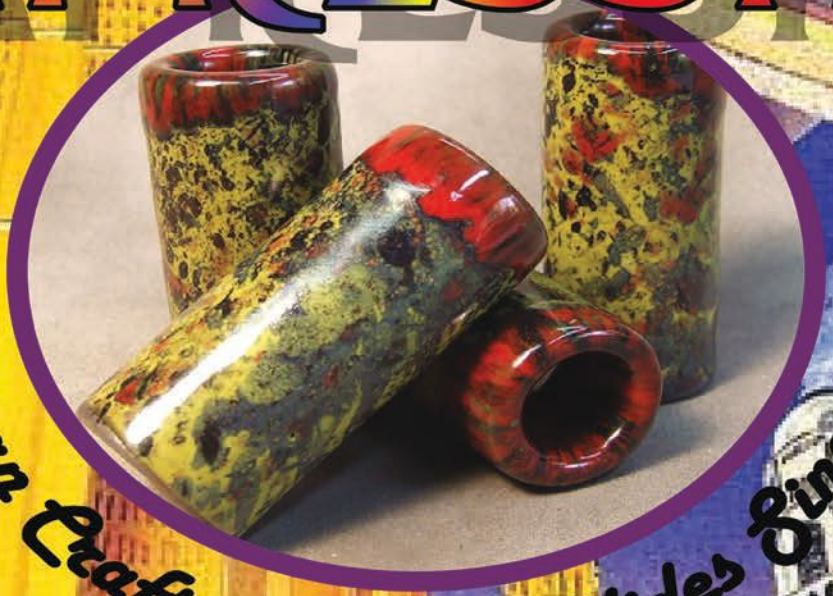

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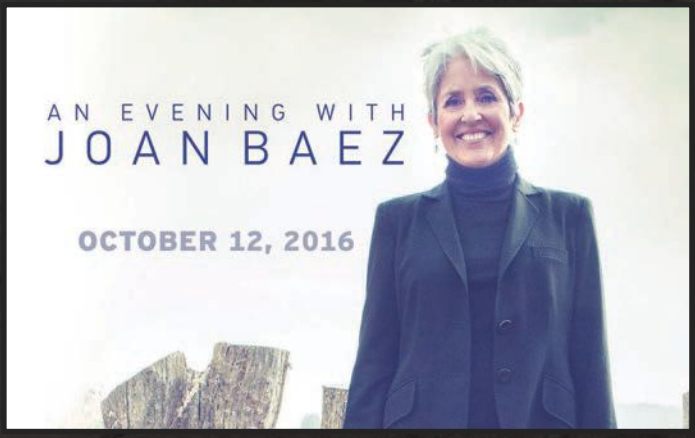

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V43 NO6

Welcome to our special Women Who Rock issue.

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME COMING AND QUITE an honor and thrill to put this together for you.

This is also September, which means that school is back in session. To that end, I have compiled a supplemental reading list/mini-syllabus for you to explore after you've finished the issue. It features a variety of memoirs, essays and historical monographs. You can find it at relix.com/deanslist.

Now with that bit of pedagogy out of the way, it's time to offer you something of a bonus track. With the 2016 election on the horizon, here's a portion of my 90-minute conversation with Bonnie Raitt and Grace Potter that didn't make it into our cover story (along with the bonus fun fact that Bonnie Raitt's current tour wraps up on November 8, which is not only Election Day but also her birthday).

I now yield the floor to Bonnie and Grace on the subject of Raitt's politically charged track "The Comin' Round Is Going Through," which appears on her latest album, *Dig in Deep*.

BR: I don't lecture, but I have a specific way that I introduce the song. *Citizens United* and the dumbing down of the news and the loss of rational debate over anything of depth these days are the most significant threats to democracy in this country. I'm going to speak out about it because it's become an insult to everybody who is putting themselves on the line for the hope of a free society that's

representative of the people, as opposed to those at the top who buy their way in.

So I encourage people to vote, and I try to be somewhat—not lighthearted—but I emphasize, "Don't give up and don't be discouraged. We can get through this." I don't need to preach—people have their own opinions and, God knows, the dialogue in this country for the next few months is going to be even more all-encompassing. We don't need to be talking about it on stage.

Our purpose is to uplift and celebrate and inspire and commiserate, and do all those things where we're all one tribe. That experience is a two-hour show in a very special place, where we go through every possible emotion with songs that span many decades and mean so much to everyone that, by the end of the evening, we will have gone through something together that's uplifted all of us. At least, that's how I feel.

GP: That's the gift that we are lucky enough to bring to the world. Sometimes, the message can resonate through you without you having to say it; other times, it does take putting your foot down and speaking out.

I haven't been talking about it directly at my shows so much as feeling the energy and providing a platform for participation. The invitation I bring is that HeadCount has been with us on tour, offering an opportunity for people to sign up to vote. A lot of kids who are in college think that they can't register to vote because they're not in their home state, or they don't know what that process is like because they're very young. So I feel lucky that I have the ability to invite people into that conversation.

BR: I think it's so great that you have HeadCount. Encouraging people to vote is the thing that's most important, along with getting volunteers to drive people to the vote and joining the fight to keep elections fair and monitored.

There's been tremendous enthusiasm. The greatest thing about this election is the fact that Bernie got as much traction that he did, and that so many young people are so motivated. I'm sure they are for the Trump side as well; it's probably going to be a really close call. We all need to be engaged because the implications of either side winning are devastating to the other side. I wish this country wasn't so polarized, but we need people to get out to the polls and really educate themselves about what the repercussions of one versus the other are.

***

So stay involved, remain informed and be sure to vote.

Women rock.

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ON THE COVER

Williams + Hirakawa shot Grace Potter and Marina Chavez shot Bonnie Raitt.

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SEPTEMBER 2016

WOMEN WHO ROCK P. 29

IT'S BEEN SAID that the music industry is a boys' club—especially when it comes to the jamband scene that helped birth the modern live-music climate. And, as **Bonnie Raitt** and **Grace Potter** (P. 54) discuss in this month's revealing cover story, it's a difficult divide to navigate, even if you consider yourself one of the guys. Both musicians have had storied careers, yet their modes of expression, personal styles and even opener choices have been unfairly criticized in ways that their male counterparts have not experienced.

In an effort to help break down those barriers, throughout this issue, we've spotlighted some of today's most unique female voices—from new, atomic supergroup **case/lang/veirs** (P. 37), soul-upstart **Andra Day** (P. 52) and current "Queen of Funk"**Sharon Jones** (P. 50) to **Delaney & Bonnie** and **Mad Dogs & Englishmen** alum **Rita Coolidge** (P. 40). We also caught up with transgender singer/guitarist/icon **Laura Jane Grace**, who leads punk-heroes **Against Me!** (P. 48), as well as the women driving Americana family band **Shovels & Rope** (P. 34), jam-scene supergroup **Van Ghost** (P. 32) and indie-pop festival favorites **MisterWives** (P. 44). **The Infamous Stringdusters** even walk us through their new female-focused album, *Ladies & Gentlemen*, and current collaborations with Ryan Adams and **Nicki Bluhm** (P. 46).

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10.7 PROVIDENCE, RI
10.8 PORTCHESTER, NY
10.9 JIM THORPE, PA
10.11 BUFFALO, NY
10.12 NORTHAMPTON, MA
10.13 PORTLAND, ME
10.14 BURLINGTON, VT
10.15 BOSTON, MA
10.26 DALLAS, TX*
10.27 HOUSTON, TX*
10.28 AUSTIN, TX*
10.29 NEW ORLEANS, LA*
10.30 LIVE OAK, FL
10.31 ASHEVILLE, NC*
11.1 CARRBORO, NC
11.2 RICHMOND, VA
11.3 PHILADELPHIA, PA
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11.5 BROOKLYN, NY
11.11 DENVER, CO
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amdo photo (Angel Olsen) , Jay Blakesberg (Grace Potter)

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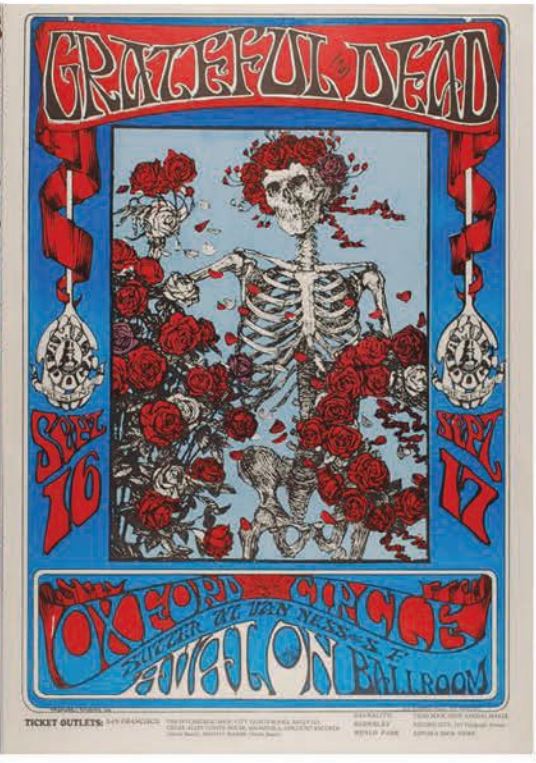

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Dear Relix

Here's what readers are talking about online and offline

Ryan Adams

DEAR RELIX

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Send your thoughts to letters@relix.com.

QUARANTINE THE PAST

I love Ryan ("Interview: Ryan Adams," July_August 2016), but will never understand why he feels the need to crap on everyone in his past. When he was in The Cardinals, every interview was about how he loved those guys like a family—they were the best band he'd ever been in, etc., then he would crap on Whiskeytown. In two years, he'll be dumping on Mike Viola and The Shining.

Ethan via Relix.com

Good interview. Ryan was never one for holding back. Bummed that he still carries animosity toward Dave Rawlings.

Rourke via Relix.com

FARE THEE WELL, ROB WASSERMAN

On June 29, bassist and founding member of RatDog Rob Wasserman passed away. He was 64. Wasserman, a longtime Bob Weir collaborator, shared the stage and the studio with the likes of Elvis Costello, David Grisman, Van Morrison, Pete Seeger and many others throughout his storied career.

This one really does hurt. Great, great guy who helped make the summer of Jerry's death a little easier on the RatDog tour, catching them the night before in Central Park and day of in New Hampshire. Rest in peace, Rob.

Tom via Relix.com

Saw him with Lou Reed when Lou previewed his *New York* album in Princeton, N.J. Great evening. Lou always had great people backing him, and Rob was among the best.

Bekemp via Jambands.com

Met him on several occasions and he was one of the kindest souls I have ever met. Last saw him playing with Rickie Lee Jones on a double bill with the good Dr. John in Rochester, N.Y. R.I.P., Rob.

Bigdaddybflo via Jambands.com

R.I.P., Rob. My fondest memory of Rob, aside from RatDog shows, was a sit-in with moe. on 9/27/03 in Memphis. He came out for a second-set-closing segue of "Happy Hour Hero" into "Recreational Chemistry." Rob Derhak kept laying down the "Rec Chem" intro and Wasserman wouldn't leave the jam. It was a purely blissful, drawn-out segue that I revisit several times a year. I would recommend a listen, especially to honor his memory during this time. Thank you for the moments during that particular show, Rob, and for your countless other contributions as well. Rest easy.

Tomcat heart via Jambands.com

RAY MORNING JACKET BIRTH *OUROBOROS*

Ray LaMontagne is one of my favorite artists ("Circular Progression: Ray LaMontagne and My Morning Jacket," July_August, 2016). Every album is its own experience. Really enjoy the new one, *Supernova* and *God Willin' & the Creek Don't Rise*. Keep 'em coming, Ray. You're creating a fine body of work.

Kevin Nelson via Relix.com

FANS.COM PHOTO CONTEST

Phish performing at Syracuse, N.Y.'s Lakeview Amphitheater on July 10, 2016. Photo by Amy de Gorgue.

Want to be published in *Relix*? Just upload an original photo from a live music event to Relix.com's Fans.com Photo Contest. Noted photographer Jay Blakesberg will select the winner from a group of 10 finalists who have received the most votes.

RECORD STORE PROFILE: REPO RECORDS, PHILADELPHIA

Since its original Wayne, Pa., location opened just a few miles outside of Philadelphia in 1986, Repo Records has remained a safe haven for indie and punk vinyl enthusiasts. Repo moved to its current location on Philly's South Street 18 years ago and now boasts a wide selection of metal, jazz, punk, hip-hop, soul, R&B, indie and classic-rock LPs, CDs and cassettes. The record store also houses a "budget basement" stacked with cheap albums priced as low as $1–5.

INSTAPRINT

Between Two Bobs: John Mayer (@johnmayer) and his Dead & Company bandmate Bob Weir seem to be forging quite the friendship offstage (along with the onstage cohesion they've established over the course of the band's first-ever summer tour). In June, Mayer snapped this picture of Weir with *Full House* actor and comedian Bob Saget with the caption, "My Two Bobs."

The Beat

THE BEST FROM FESTS & TOURS TODAY

NEWPORT FOLK FESTIVAL

NEWPORT, R.I.

JULY 22-24

BY MIKE GREENHAUS // PHOTOGRAPH BY DINO PERRUCCI

Alabama Shakes' Brittany Howard

It's been almost a decade since **Newport Folk** started shifting its focus from legacy acts to a new generation of roots-leaning indie bands, but the 57-year-old gathering feels more important than ever during a summer defined by increasingly static lineups and an arms race between big-time promoters Live Nation and AEG. And while "curated," "tastemaker" and "experiential" are now industry buzzwords, Newport Folk remains one of the few major festivals that still feels like a true, old-school hootenanny.

Newport Folk has long incorporated a variety of styles outside its namesake genre, and this year's marquee acts showed the festival broadening its scope even further: The three-day event boasted the likes of **Flight of the Conchords**, **The Arcs** and **Patti Smith & Her Band** in addition to more expected, modern organic American-traditional acts like **Alabama Shakes**, **Edward Sharpe & The Magnetic Zeros** , **Father John Misty**, **Ryan Adams**, **Norah Jones**, **Brett Dennen** and **Ray LaMontagne**, the latter of whom focused on material from his two latest records with the help of **My Morning Jacket**'s members. **Graham Nash**, **Del & Dawg** and **Kris Kristofferson**, who continued a recent Newport trend of headliner-size surprise performances, represented the festival's old guard. (Kristofferson played a breakout set at Newport Folk in the '60s when he was known primarily as Johnny Cash's guitarist.)

A number of sit-ins took place each day, a sign of the festival's impressive hang quality. Of note, **Matthew Logan Vasquez** brought out **Eric D. Johnson**, **Parkington Sisters** and drummer **Jeremy Black**'s father **Marc** during his set; **Langhorne Slim** jammed with **Wild Child**; **Preservation Hall Jazz Band** marched onstage with Sharpe; **Blind Boys of Alabama** added some Sunday gospel to **Phil Cook**'s revue; and **Margo Price** joined Kristofferson and **The Texas Gentlemen** for "Me and Bobby McGee." The members of **Deer Tick**, Newport's 21st-century house band, were onsite as well, with most of the band backing **Ruby Amanfu** and frontman **John McCauley** reviving his **Middle Brother** project with Vasquez and **Dawes**' **Taylor Goldsmith**. Though he technically played a "solo" set, **Elvis Costello** took home the cross-pollination award, inviting out representatives from Preservation Hall, Middle Brother and **The Lovell Sisters** , as well as **Glen Hansard** during his main stage slot. (He also joined Hansard for a take on "Lowly Deserter" earlier in the day.)

Covers dotted numerous setlists, too. Jones reworked the Grateful Dead gem "It Must Have Been the Roses," **case/lang/veirs** nodded to fellow supergroup CSNY with Neil Young's classic "Helpless," and **Amy Helm** paid tribute to her family lineage with The Band's "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," emphasizing the line, "like my father before me." (Nash honored Levon Helm as well with "Back Home," an original he wrote in tribute to the late drummer.) Of course, in some cases, covers served as springboards for collaboration, whether it was Vasquez sitting in with **Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats** on "The Shape I'm In," Adams unplugging Slayer and Black Sabbath tunes with **Nicki Bluhm** and **The Infamous Stingdusters**, or Dawes helping Alabama Shakes through Bob Seger's "Night Moves."

However, it was Newport newbie and punk-poet Smith, during one of her only 2016 U.S. performances, who seemed to encapsulate Newport's entire history—tackling everything from festival co-founder Peter Seeger's Weavers number "If I Had a Hammer," Allen Ginsberg's "Holy Holy Holy" and Bob Dylan's "Boots of Spanish Leather" to Prince's "When Doves Cry," The Rolling Stones' "The Last Time" and The Who's "My Generation," which bled into her own "Rock N Roll Nigger." Perhaps more important, her penultimate offering, the original "People Have the Power," was a poignant reminder that every generation is capable of their own authentic folk anthems.

OUTSIDE LANDS MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL

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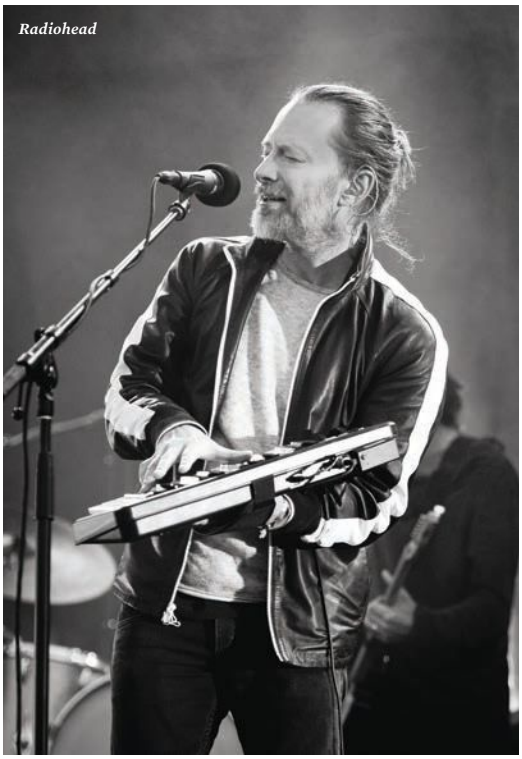
AUGUST 5-7

BY MIKE GREENHAUS // PHOTOGRAPHY BY STUART LEVINE AND DAVE VANN



Radiohead

Sufjan Stevens

Vulfpeck

Jason Isbell and Ryan Adams

Dr. Teeth & The Electric Mayhem

If there was any doubt that **Outside Lands** is as much a cultural gathering as it is a traditional music festival, then look no further than the fact that **The Muppets** upstaged weekend headliners **Radiohead**, **LCD Soundsystem** and **Lionel Richie**. Presenting the "live debut" of *The Muppet Show*'s classic house band, **Dr. Teeth & The Electric Mayhem** , during an ADD-friendly afternoon set, Jim Henson's characters quickly moved from shtick to all-encompassing weekend highlight, proving to be the perfect summation of a festival built on San Francisco's smart, free-thinking, Left Coast energy. Dr. Teeth—sounding more like Dr. John than ever, 40 years after *The Last Waltz*—nodded to the festival scene's indie-jam bedrock with parent-approved covers of Edward Sharpe & The Magnetic Zeros' "Home" and The Band's "Ophelia," brought out a full choir for a twist on Joe Cocker's rendition of "With a Little Help from My Friends," and guided his audience on a PG-13 tour of San Francisco's cultural history. The set could have doubled as an EPK for an event that celebrates the Bay Area's cultural roots through authentic local food vendors, wine tastings and even a libation-fueled mini-golf course.

The brainchild of Bonnaroo co-creators Superfly and Bill Graham Presents offshoot Another Planet, Outside Lands consistently balances impressive main-stage bookings, like **Air**, **Duran Duran**, **Chance the Rapper** and **Kamasi Washington** with classy side-stage alternatives, such as **The Oh Hellos**, **Kevin Morby**, **Vulfpeck** and **Rüfüs Du Sol**, without coloring between the lines. Oftentimes this year, those worlds collided in exciting and truly tasteful ways. In The Barbary, **Fred Armisen** hosted a set of improv comedy before moving behind the kit to back Hüsker Dü frontman, and area resident, **Bob Mould** on a selection of straight-ahead musical numbers. **Les Claypool** pulled double duty by performing with **The Claypool Lennon Delirium** and showcasing his Claypool Cellars in Wine Lands. Around the corner in Gastromagic, wig-wearing members of **Ra Ra Riot** delivered a faithful set of Police covers while *Top Chef* star **Melissa King** offered some pro kitchen tips onstage. (Gastromagic housed the weekend's most direct nod to Golden Gate Park's counterculture history through such offerings as a drug-free re-creation of an Acid Test set with **Reed Mathis**' new **Electric Beethoven** project.) Beer Lands, Choco Lands and Cheese Lands also each felt like mini-cities of their own.

Perhaps most surprisingly, **Big Boi** embraced Outside Lands' kinetic energy more than anyone, offering a short pop-up show in the back of the Polo Fields, playing a proper set with current creative partners **Phantogram** and serving up BBQ "skewing" tips for foodies. Other collaborations happened more naturally, including Dave Matthews Band trumpeter **Rashawn Ross** performing with his part-time band **Lettuce**, **Ryan Adams** joining recent tourmate **Jason Isbell** for a cover of The Rolling Stones' "Sway" and Isbell returning the favor by sitting in during Adams' set for "Oh My Sweet Carolina." (Adams' **Major Lazer** banter proved that he could also have a second career entertaining in The Barbary.)

Of course, the festival's marquee acts weren't too shabby, either. Radiohead—who played Golden Gate Park's first ticketed after-dark show during the inaugural Outside Lands in 2008—brought things full circle with a set heavy on thoughtful, chamber-rock songs that paired well with the event's maturing demographic. LCD Soundsystem continued their summer onslaught with a mix of modern classics and more experimental dance tracks that recalled *Stop Making Sense* Talking Heads, while Richie proved that there's a place for karaoke-style sing-alongs on the artisanal concert circuit if you own it just enough.

Vann (Vulfpeck); Levine (Radiohead, Adams & Isbell, Stevens, Dr. Teeth)

Bird on a Wire

Sometimes, love is all you need. BY RACHAEL YAMAGATA

WOMEN WHO ROCK

IT'S DAUNTING TO write about a subject of my choice—in prose, that is. Songs are easier—they live in subtext and you often have an entire album share an identity. Melody and delivery hint at possible intention for the listener to interpret, and there doesn't always have to be a message behind the song at all. This, however, is stark. Words only here.

My subject for this piece is love.

We live in a time of extreme passion, brutal, unimaginable acts, suffering and heated debate, but we all want love. I believe this. I "fluffy bunny" believe, knowing this could change the world. How to love each other better has always been the focus of my work—the pursuit of connection, emotional bridge-building, the translation of need. Still, I'm a social hermit, continually battling insecurity and questioning my own voice. How many others out there with the potential to heal are holding back out of fear? Posturing and blustering and pontificating are loud, big things, but love is a quieter thing. It's the most powerful tool that we forget to use when we are attacked or on the defensive, but it may make all the difference.

In business, I try to choose my M.I.T. (most important thing) for each day. We have limited attention spans and energy, and doing this is crucial to moving the big picture along. What if our life M.I.T. could be kindness? Respect? Compassion? We could still yell and fight for, convince and sway, but if something kind took precedence, then could we do all of it—better? This doesn't mean not taking a stand for what you believe in—it takes heat to make change—but rather remembering that we are all in this together and

we have to reach one another at the core. We have to open hearts in order to get in.

I write what I feel and hope it picks up on something that others can connect with, entering that *art is a reflection of our world zone*, but I never know. Of late, I've been thinking of the tightrope walker—balance, focus, perseverance—one careful foot in front of the other to get to the other side. Something in my heart is driving me to express our need to keep going through the grand heartache, whatever it may be, on a personal and global level. I dig for how we can quiet the noise, find our center and become privy to a new perspective that brings us to greater heights and inspires others. Can we transcend our pain and contribute by being our own symbol of strength and peace, practice and diligence? I think we can, and I think we are all trying our best to do so daily. Pain only holds us down—holds us back and colors our actions in ways we might not choose if our source was love.

It starts with the simple things—the way you do even one thing. Are you present, full, authentically there for whatever it is? Small group dynamics of your family, a band, two people from the opposite ends of the earth interacting—what are they like? These specific dances among us can shed light onto a bigger picture of the energy directing the state of the world. Our own homes become the butterfly effect. If we can't find a way to communicate and relieve our hearts within the context of our inner circle, then how can we hope to do so on a grander scale?

There is a sweet spot during a performance when all stage fright is lost and the audience and artist are one. It's like being in the zone for athletes, and you can almost actually see the energy in the room. You can bend it and direct it and everyone feels connected and part of something greater. It's a perfectly flowing conversation, the great date magic. It can be power for just the showman or power for all. It can start revolutions and channel our passions, lift us to new ideas and bring people together. I think of the tightrope walker in this continual state of perfect poetic movement, walking for no reason other than he is compelled to do so, and the symbol of what he does and all it takes to do so affects us. He is the art. Transcending the pain of our lives and pushing through in spite of it, with love and kindness still, to me, is art.

We have precious little time but still have the ability to give to one another, to share moments and streams and streets of connection. We can hug and join hands and run. We can remind ourselves to pursue magic with each other and for each other, and that we as a collective whole can move mountains. We can be grateful and start small and find our why and breathe and act with our authentic selves and speak up and stand out in loud and quiet ways. We still have time to be loving toward someone and to hear them—*really* hear them. And all of this is hard. It means looking someone directly in the eye and showing yourself in the most vulnerable way and hoping they get you, too. We will fail many times at this, but we have to try. You are the artist of your own life. Use your gift. Trust. Stay open. Love.

Rachael Yamagata will release her fourth album, Tightrope Walker, *on September 23 via Frankenfish/Thirty Tigers. She produced the record with the help of longtime collaborator John Alagia.*

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Soundcheck

LIVE REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE *Compiled by* DEAN BUDNICK

Trey Anastasio elevates

PHISH

THE FORUM
INGLEWOOD, CALIF.
JULY 22

A sweltering sky, thick with the sickly glow of wildfire smoke, hung over the fabulous Forum as **Phish** arrived in Southern California for the penultimate night of the quartet's summer trek. The week's previous stops at the Gorge and Bill Graham Civic Auditorium reveled in tour debuts and multi-night setlist stunts, but this one-off in Inglewood, Calif., saw the group deliver a three-hour performance with seemingly knowing nods to the coastal locale and its iconic hillsides.

Guitarist **Trey Anastasio** counted in the opening "The Moma Dance," as drummer **Jon Fishman** told the tale of stormy seas against stabilizing funk. A rather curt "Sample in a Jar,"and the equally brisk bluegrass of "Paul and Silas"—the evening's biggest rarity—followed, before bassist **Mike Gordon**'s reggae-lite solo cut, "Yarmouth Road." An injection of energy came from the thumping "Kill Devil Falls," then took a step back with well-executed, yet somewhat restrained turns on '90s *Rift* nugget "Horn" and keyboardist **Page McConnell**'s *Fuego* cut, "Halfway to the Moon."

Igniting classic arena-rock "ohs and whoas," "Blaze On," struck the flint, before "Stash" united The Forum in triplet-clapping and harmonious chants. Anastasio got a little ahead of himself in the throes of the arrangement, but the attentive audience quickly forgiven him after he smiled and shaped a brooding, sustained solo. The downbeat crunch of "Cavern" hinted at ending the first half, only to shift to the high gear of the soul for a closing "Run Like an Antelope."

After an atypically long, 60-minute break, the four returned to push the mercury, tearing off "Axilla" and another nod to the heat with a somewhat fragmented "Fuego." Soon after, Phish dipped into a mini-segment of water songs with "Prince Caspian," McConnell's solo rolling over into a surging "Waves." Anastasio's tribute to his late sister, the somber "Joy," and a churning "The Wedge" gave way to the second half's most daring improvisational sequences on "Scent of a Mule," with Anastasio and Fishman spacewalking in tandem on Marimba Lumina.

The Velvet Underground's "Rock & Roll" served as the evening's finest true group effort, led by Anastasio's broiling guitar work. A sprightly "You Enjoy Myself," with its trademark vocal jam, wrapped the second set in classic style. The shake and bake of Stevie Wonder's "Boogie on Reggae Woman" kicked off an unusual three-song encore that included a tidy "Bouncing Around the Room" and a rowdy "Golgi Apparatus"—its exclamatory choruses shared with the capacity crowd. While certainly not the defining show of Phish's summer tour, this scorching Friday night in California, nonetheless, offered an affable assortment of sparks and swells.

Larson Sutton

Stuart Levine

THE CLAYPOOL LENNON DELIRIUM

WILMA THEATRE
MISSOULA, MONT.
JULY 26

It's a match made in some Tim Burton-esque version of heaven: the off-kilter musical genius who is one of rock's weirdest ambassadors, **Les Claypool**, mashed up with the younger, avant-garde leanings of **Sean Lennon**. They may not share a family name (though they do look oddly alike), but they're cut from the same musical cloth, and fortunately they assembled **The Claypool Lennon Delirium** to prove it. Some combinations of massive talent bounce off each other like oil and water, but CLD's stop at Missoula, Mont.'s Wilma Theatre was a testament to the veracity of this two-headed psych-rock beast.

The four-piece took the stage to the backing track of their own song "There's No Underwear in Space" and charged through both movements of "Cricket and the Genie." Lennon was clearly having issues with his guitar and was inaudible at first, but the problem was resolved in time for his talkbox-laden lead on "Breath of a Salesman." Claypool has already found his home in Montana—making a stop in Missoula with Primus for the last three years would suggest that it's more than just the state's fishing reputation that brings him back—but the crowd response to Lennon's first solo of the night let it be known that he was equally welcome in Big Sky country.

Claypool bit into his first gargantuan bass solo during a rendition of the Les Claypool Frog Brigade's "Up on the Roof," trading lines with keys player **Mark Ramos Nishita**, as drummer **Paul Baldi** held down the rhythm. Claypool's distinct virtuosity is an unmistakable stamp on all his projects but, here, he also exercises restraint as a supporting player, handing Lennon the reins for tunes like "Animals" from the guitarist's other band, The Ghost of a Saber Tooth Tiger. A contorted synthesizer solo led the sordid jam going into "Mr. Wright," and Claypool brought the stand-up bass and bow out for an appropriately hallucinatory take on the early Pink Floyd tune "Astronomy Domine."

The best covers were yet to come though, as Lennon paid homage to his father's pioneering psychedelia with a churning interpretation of The Beatles' "Tomorrow Never Knows" to end the set. Claypool emerged alone to begin the encore, playing some of the Frog Brigade tune "Running the Gauntlet" before the rest of the band joined him for the raucous Primus crowd favorite "Southbound Pachyderm" that sprawled out into a wild jam, testifying to the eccentric talents of both frontmen.

Jed Nussbaum

Matt Riley, Eli Johnson

FORECASTLE

LOUISVILLE, KY.
JULY 15-17

Unlike festivals with flashy headliners and advertising muscle that are born in industry boardrooms and swing out of the gate, Forecastle has grown naturally over the course of 14 years—starting in a small neighborhood park with a collection of local acts and blossoming into a sprawling urban oasis spanning four stages across Waterfront Park in downtown Louisville, Ky.

Giant puppet facsimiles of Bluegrass State heroes from local art collective Squallis—including Hunter S. Thompson and, of course, The Colonel—roved about the crowd, while neighborhood food trucks and merchants peppered the festival grounds. The Bourbon Lodge served up a highly respectable smorgasbord of the state's finest export. Throughout the weekend, the festival's core mission of environmental stewardship took a front seat through efforts like utilizing clean energy to power the festival, waste reduction programs and a massive bike valet outside the gates. Live art installations and murals, a party yacht, resplendent costumes, a Gonzo-inspired cocktail tent and lifeguards posted like Walmart greeters yielded the type of otherworldly milieu usually found in middle-of-nowhere festivals. Only the Louisville skyline and a large overpass that bisects the park (and provides cover for the more hip-hop and electronic-oriented Ocean Stage) are reminders that, indeed, you're in the middle of a city.

The Delireum Hits Montana

Ryan Adams, **Death Cab for Cutie**, **Alabama Shakes** and **The Avett Brothers** were among the headlining acts who helped draw a record crowd of 65,000 this year. But as is often the case, it was the festival undercards that served up the unexpected moments of magic. **Caveman**'s introspective, moody brand of aerodynamic anthems summoned an early Friday evening storm that cleared the festival grounds for an hour—with thunder as bombastic as the New York quintet's live sound. Nashville's **Bully** later laid down elements of sludge sorcery à la L7 and muscular dream-pop with hooks to spare, as the sunset cast a sky as fiery as their set.

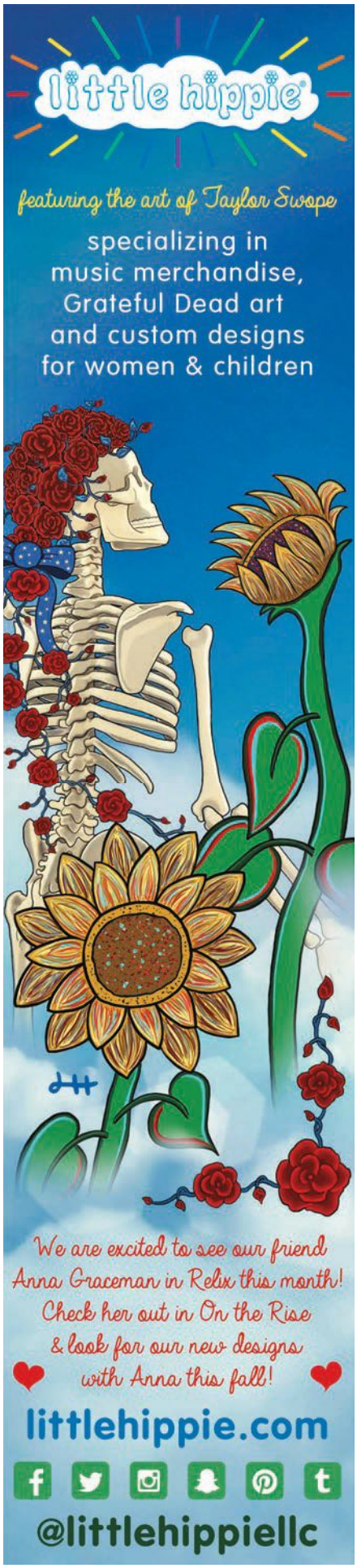
Saturday saw a radioactive performance from **Danny Brown** that kept a sizable crowd bouncing at the Ocean Stage, while former hardcore rabble-rousers-cum-rumbling, thunderous shoegaze monsters **Nothing** recreated the sensation of standing inside a nuclear reactor—easily the loudest show of the weekend, if not the festival's history.

In the event you needed manna to keep the weekend going, Sunday's main stage opened with a blistering Afrobeat blast from **Femi Kuti & The Positive Force**. **Unknown Mortal Orchestra**'s **Ruban Nielson** proved himself to be an unassuming shredder with an amazingly tight, rhythmically astounding live band on Sunday evening, while across the park, **Steve Gunn**'s breezy psych-folk floated gently over the gleaming river backdrop.

Reasonably comfortable despite balmy July weather, easily manageable, friendly, and a well-oiled machine, Forecastle is large enough to scratch most musical itches and cultivate a distinct, self-contained environment. (Even Friday's evacuation caused minimal schedule disruption.) At the same time, it's still small enough that it never seems unwieldy to even the most casual festivalgoer—not to mention more bourbon than you can shake a rocks glass at while taking in psychedelic sunsets.

Zach Hart

An Afrobeat blast from Femi Kuti & The Positive Force.



MICHAEL FRANTI & SPEARHEAD

EXPRESS LIVE!
COLUMBUS, OHIO
JULY 24

With a 24/7 news cycle that highlights one maddening event after another, it was a much-needed relief to revel in the musical oasis provided by **Michael Franti & Spearhead** at Express Live!

The two-hour concert echoed Franti's transformation from a protest singer yearning to make a difference to a Soul Rocker who raises spirits in the hope that the positive vibes cultivated at his shows spread beyond the venues' doors.

Back in 2003, Franti preached to the converted when he sang, "We can bomb the world to pieces/ But we can't bomb it into peace" in "Bomb the World." On this night, his politics subliminally made their way into a mix of reggae, rock and dance material on "Say Hey," "Life Is Better With You" and nine numbers from his latest album, *Soulrocker*.

He connected with personal, emotional setups that were universally understood—describing the feelings of pride and trepidation when his son left home for a cross-country bus trip before playing "I Got Love for Ya" or the need to love and unite after discussing his younger son fighting kidney disease prior to "Once a Day."

Referencing the ongoing desire for peace in the world, he prefaced "My Lord" by pointing out that such a goal can be realized through religion, yoga, music and other spiritual paths.

Always ready to interact with the audience, Franti invited a young couple onstage to sing during the night's second number, "The Sound of Sunshine." Following that, he left the main stage to join concertgoers in the pit while on his way to a smaller stage. There, he pulled up various members of the crowd, which included a dozen children, to sing, dance, hug and high five. At times, he seemed to spend more time among his fans than with his five-piece band.

As Franti introduced the members of Spearhead and their crew for an inclusive bow, John Lennon's "Imagine" played on the PA. Then, Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds" sent the crowd off into the world. In Franti's congregation, the song's refrain of "Every little thing gonna be alright" felt particularly genuine, even in this instant, social-media age.

John Patrick Gatta

MARC RIBOT & THE YOUNG PHILADELPHIANS

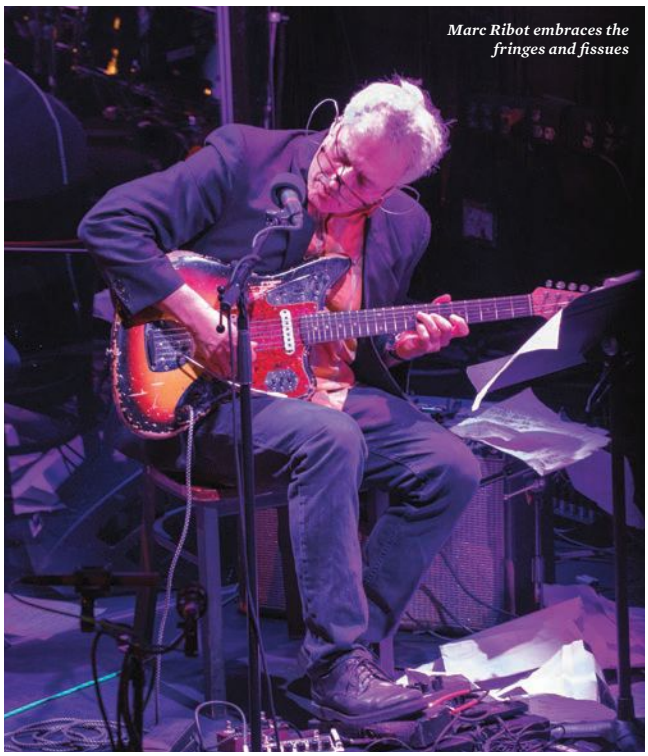
BOWERY BALLROOM
NEW YORK
JULY 28

Marc Ribot loves the fringes, the fissures, the frayed edges—those places where the nominal borders of certain forms of music seemingly vanish. In his latest project, the hypnotically whacked-out **Young Philadelphians**, those borders don't as much disappear as give in to each other.

This Bowery Ballroom event was the release show

The Soul Rocker encircled by the faithful

John Patrick Gatta



Marc Ribot embraces the fringes and fissues

Kathy Chee

for the Young Philadelphians' new album, *Live in Tokyo*. The suggestion is hard-grooving Philly soul that can go anywhere, pleasantly drunk on its improvisational possibilities. The execution has more rock and punk-jazz in it than that suggestion sounds like, plus a three-piece string section that can delicately color the chosen songs or cut bloody ribbons through them.

Ribot, as exciting a chameleon as any to ever pick up an electric guitar, and a longtime collaborator of everyone from Tom Waits and Los Lobos to Medeski Martin & Wood and Nels Cline (who was in the audience), was in his manic-professor-like attack mode, playing with and against fellow axe-man **Chris Cochran** (subbing on this tour for Mary Halvorson). Bassist **Jamaaladeen Tacuma**, who played with Ornette Coleman during fascinating periods in the '70s and '80s, came off like a free-jazz escapee from the P-Funk circus—a lover of gnarled harmonies and pliable grooves. Then there's the remarkable **G. Calvin Weston**, who survived a terrible tragedy in the last decade to become ever more himself as a jazz and funk drummer. Together, they've made a conscious choice not to be the polite mess that supergroups can be, by committing to this stuff and really making it potent, rather than merely diverting.

The Bowery set was nearly two hours but wrapped up in what felt like an eye-blink—songs mined for their possibilities and amply spun around the room like day-glo-colored tops, never going on too long. "Love Rollercoaster," "Do It Anyway You Want" and "TSOP (The Sound of Philadelphia)" were avant-sounding renderings of soul and groove songs, but Ribot intended for them not to be overly cerebral. In that vein, Young Philadelphians take their place among Sex Mob, various John Zorn groups and a loving tradition of Downtown New York experimental music. You're so much in the thrall of what, at first, sounds like highbrow, danceable chaos that you've moved into its orbit and its wavelength, where your heart knows before your brain does.

Chad Berndtson

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The 2016 *Relix* Festival Guide: Encore

Summertime done, come and gone, my, oh, my, but festival season is still going strong. In the final installment of our annual festival guide, we've rounded up some of this fall and winter's best multi-band gatherings and destination events. Be sure to grab copies of our April_May, June, and July_August issues at relix.com for the skinny on this spring and summer's best fests.

Lineups are current as of press time and will continue to be updated at the newly refreshed www.relix.com/festivals.
If you see an **(R)** next to a listing, then be sure to visit us at the *Relix* booth onsite.

Suwannee Hulaween

Dave Vann

Mighty Mississippi Music Festival
9/30-10/2 // Greenville, MS
The Revivalists, G. Love & Special Sauce, Ryan Bingham, Maren Morris, Dead Soldiers, Chris LeBlanc, more
mightymississippimusicfestival.com

CRSSD Festival
10/1-2 // San Diego, CA
Miike Snow, ZHU, Cashmere Cat, Thomas Jack, Trippy Turtle, Bonobo, Malaa, Lee Burridge, DJ Harvey, more
crssdfest.com

The Meadows Music & Arts Festival
10/1-2 // Queens, NY
Kanye West, The Weeknd, Chance the Rapper, Kygo, The 1975, Bryson Tiller, Pretty Lights, Grimes, Empire of the Sun, Chromeo, Damian Marley, Mac Miller, Cage the Elephant, Metric, Savages, more
themeadowsnyc.com

Roots Picnic NYC
10/1-2 // New York, NY
The Roots, D'Angelo, John Mayer, Wu-Tang Clan, David Byrne, Nile Rodgers, Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue, X Ambassadors, Swizz Beatz, Kevin Gates, Deerhoof, more
rootspicnic.com/newyork

Shakori Hills GrassRoots Festival of Music & Dance
10/6-9 // Pittsboro, NC
Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn, Donna the Buffalo, AJ Ghent Band, Darlingside, Hank, Pattie & The Current, more
shakorihillsgrassroots.org

Mustang Music Festival
10/7-8 // Corolla, NC
moe., Lettuce, G. Love & Special Sauce, Yonder Mountain String Band, Mike Dillon Band, Smooth Hound Smith, Fruition, Big Something, Ripe, more
mustangmusicfestival.com

III Points
10/7-9 // Miami, FL
LCD Soundsystem, Thievery Corporation, M83, Method Man & Redman, Flying Lotus, Earl Sweatshirt, Vince Staples, Thee Oh Sees, DIIV, more
iiipoints.com

Desert Trip
10/7-9 & 10/14-16 // Indio, CA
The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Paul McCartney, Neil Young + Promise of the Real, Roger Waters, The Who
deserttrip.com

The Festy Experience
10/7-9 // Arrington, VA
The Infamous Stringdusters, Nicki Bluhm, Sam Bush Band, Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn, Mary Chapin Carpenter, North Mississippi Allstars & Anders Osborne, Lee Ann Womack, Rubblebucket, Elephant Revival, Steep Canyon Rangers, more
thefesty.com

Hillberry: The Harvest Moon Festival
10/13-16 // Eureka Springs, AR
Railroad Earth, Greensky Bluegrass, The Infamous Stringdusters, The Travelin' McCourys, The New Mastersounds, Elephant Revival, Turkuaz, Larry Keel, Fruition, The Ben Miller Band, Split Lip Rayfield, more
hillberryfestival.com

Luna Light Music & Arts Festival
10/13-16 // Darlington, MD
Tipper, Medeski Martin Benevento & Russo, Electron, The New Deal, Dopapod, Pigeons Playing Ping Pong, Tom Hamilton's American Babies, Pink Talking Fish, more
lunalightfestival.com

Suwannee Roots Revival
10/13-16 // Live Oak, FL
Leftover Salmon, Sam Bush, The Wood Brothers, Donna the Buffalo, Peter Rowan Band, Jim Lauderdale, Col. Bruce Hampton, Verlon Thompson, more
suwanneerootsrevival.com

Desert Daze
10/14-16 // Joshua Tree, CA
Primus, Television, Washed Out, The Brian Jonestown Massacre, The Sonics, Deerhunter, The Back Angels, Andrew W.K., Thee Oh Sees, Beach Fossils, Temples, Pond, Here We Go Magic, Bombino, more
desertdaze.org

Magnolia Fest
10/15 // St. Augustine, FL
JJ Grey & Mofro, The Infamous Stringdusters, Keller Williams, Zach Deputy, Billy Bragg, Sarah Lee Guthrie, This Frontier Needs Heroes, more
magnoliafest.com

Treasure Island Music Festival
10/15-16 // San Francisco, CA
Sigur Rós, Ice Cube, James Blake, Purity Ring, ZHU, Glass Animals, Tycho, Duke Dumont, Mac DeMarco, Young Thug, Sylvan Esso, Neon Indian, Wild Nothing, more
treasureislandfestival.com

Hangtown Music Festival
10/20-23 // Placerville, CA
Railroad Earth, Medeski Martin & Wood, Karl Denson's Tiny Universe, The Infamous Stringdusters, The Wood Brothers, Nicki Bluhm & The Gramblers, Nahko and Medicine for the People, more
hangtownfestival.com
PREVIOUSLY... Formerly known as the Hangtown Halloween Ball, last year's event found hosts Railroad Earth playing a spooky cover of Skrillex's "Scary Monsters and Nice Sprites" in the middle of their final set on October 25.

LEAF Festival
10/20-23 // Black Mountain, NC
Balkan Beat Box, Beats Antique, Squirrel Nut Zippers, Third World, Solas, Here Come the Mummies, Too Many Zoos, more
theleaf.org/the-festival

Aftershock
10/22-23 // Sacramento, CA
Tool, Slayer, Primus, Avenged Sevenfold, Korn, Disturbed, The Pretty Reckless, Anthrax, more
aftershockconcert.com

Beach Goth
10/22-23 // Silverado, CA
Bon Iver, Patti Smith, James Blake, The Growlers, Justice, Gucci Mane, RL Grime, Future Islands, Nicolas Jaar, Violent Femmes, TLC, King Krule, more
beachgothfest.com

(R) Suwannee Hulaween
10/28-30 // Live Oak, FL
The String Cheese Incident, My Morning Jacket, Disclosure, Logic, Umphrey's McGee, STS9, Big Gigantic feat. The Motet, Rebelution, The Claypool Lennon Delirium, Gramatik, Lettuce, Greensky Bluegrass, more
suwanneehulaween.com
PREVIOUSLY... It's always a party when Hulaween's masters of ceremony, The String Cheese Incident, come to town. At their Halloween bash last year, the band played three guest-filled shows highlighted by a Halloween collaboration with the Antibalas Horns on covers of Stevie Wonder's "Signed, Sealed, Delivered I'm Yours" and Sister Sledge's classic "We Are Family."

Jam Cruise

Jason Charme

Voodoo Music & Arts Experience
10/28-30 // New Orleans, LA
Tool, Arcade Fire, The Weeknd, G-Eazy, The Chainsmokers, Band of Horses, Cage the Elephant, Kevin Gates, Die Antwoord, Porter Robinson, Carnage, Foals, Rebelution, Excision, Gramatik, Ghost, STS9, Puscifer, The Claypool Lennon Delirium, more
voodoofestival.com

Dominican Holidaze
12/1-5 // Punta Cana, Dominican Republic
Umphrey's McGee, STS9, The Disco Biscuits, Joe Russo's Almost Dead, Lotus, Lettuce, Shpongle, The Floozies, more
dominicanholidaze.com
PREVIOUSLY... On Dec. 3, 2015, former Stone Temple Pilots frontman Scott Weiland turned out to be the first of an unfortunately long list of musical luminaries to pass away over the last 10 months. Three days after Weiland's death, Umphrey's McGee honored the troubled musician with a cover of STP's "Plush" during the encore of their Holidaze show.

Strings & Sol
12/9-13 // Puerto Morelos, Mexico
Yonder Mountain String Band, Greensky Bluegrass, Railroad Earth, Leftover Salmon, The Infamous Stringdusters, Keller & The Keels, Keller Williams' Grateful Grass, Nicki Bluhm, more
stringsandsol.com

Closer to the Sun
12/14-18 // Puerto Morelos, Mexico
Slightly Stoopid, Dirty Heads, Matisyahu, Tribal Seeds, Stick Figure
closertothesun.com

Phish: Riviera Maya
1/13-15 // Riviera Maya, Mexico
Phish
phishrivieramaya.com
PREVIOUSLY...Earlier this year, Phish made their Mexico debut as they forayed into the world of musical destination events. The group nodded to the late David Bowie with a standout version of the Phish song that bears his name, and they also acknowledged their picturesque surroundings with a debut cover of Led Zeppelin's "The Ocean" during their final encore of the event.

Gov't Mule's Island Exodus 8
1/14-18 // Runaway Bay, Jamaica
Gov't Mule, Warren Haynes, Soulive, Nicki Bluhm, The Marcus King Band, Ron Holloway, more
islandexodus.com

(R) Jam Cruise 15
1/20-25 // Miami, FL; Ocho Rios, Jamaica; Grand Cayman Island
The Original Meters, moe., GRiZ, Galactic, Karl Denson's Tiny Universe, Benevento/Russo Duo, Lettuce, Kamasi Washington, The Revivalists, The Motet, Beats Antique, Break Science, The Soul Rebels, Vulfpeck, Dopapod, Turkuaz, more
jamcruise.com
PREVIOUSLY... Marco Benevento and Joe Russo will revive their Benevento/Russo Duo project for the first time since 2010 aboard Jam Cruise 15 in January. Though it has been a decade since the Duo released an album, the keyboardist and drummer continue to collaborate as members of Joe Russo's Almost Dead, who played a set with Nicole Atkins on Jam Cruise earlier this year.

Castaway with Southern Ground
1/30-2/3 // Riviera Maya, Mexico
Zac Brown Band, Rodrigo y Gabriela, Toots & The Maytals, JJ Grey & Mofro, Maren Morris, Margo Price, Drake White & The Big Fire, Muddy Magnolias, more
zbbcastaway.com

One Big Holiday
2/4-8 // Riviera Maya, Mexico
My Morning Jacket, Gary Clark Jr., The Head and the Heart, Kurt Vile & The Violators, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Deer Tick, Lucius, Carl Broemel, tUnE-yArDs, more
mmjonebigholiday.com
PREVIOUSLY...After taking this year off, My Morning Jacket will return to Mexico in 2017 for the next edition of their One Big Holiday event. A bevy of guests sat in with the Kentucky-bred band during the 2015 installment of One Big Holiday, including Dawes' Taylor Goldsmith, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Conor Oberst, Band of Horses' Ben Bridwell and Amelia Meath.

Keeping the Blues Alive at Sea III
2/6-10 // Tampa, FL; Costa Maya, Mexico
Joe Bonamassa, Gregg Allman, Beth Hart, Nicki Bluhm & The Gramblers, Joanne Shaw Taylor, Anders Osborne, Jaimoe's Jasssz Band, Jack Pearson, Eric Gales, The London Souls, more
bluesaliveatsea.com

The Avett Brothers at the Beach
2/9-13 // Riviera Maya, Mexico
The Avett Brothers, Band of Horses, Brandi Carlile, Jason Isbell, Lake Street Dive, The Devil Makes Three, more
avettsatthebeach.com

Panic en la Playa
2/27-3/3 // Riviera Maya, Mexico
Widespread Panic, Playa Allstars feat. George Porter Jr., Karl Denson, Eric Krasno, Ivan Neville, Col. Bruce Hampton, Jennifer Hartswick & Terence Higgins, Southern Soul Assembly, Orgone, Bloodkin, more
panicenlaplaya.com
PREVIOUSLY... Though fans did not know it at the time, this year's Panic en la Playa turned out to be founding drummer Todd Nance's final shows with Widespread Panic. Nance, who had been on hiatus since September 2014, rejoined Panic for a spirited run in Mexico that included a few songs the group had not touched since his initial departure. After the destination event, Panic confirmed that Duane Trucks would be the band's permanent drummer moving forward.

Stef Scamardo

BY BRADLEY TUCKER

STEF SCAMARDO started Hard Head Management out of her bedroom in 1994 while she was still working a day job elsewhere in the music industry. She jumped into Hard Head full-time two years later and, for the past 20 years, has overseen the careers of acts like Warren Haynes, Gov't Mule, Eric Krasno, Soulive, DJ Logic and The Marcus King Band from her office near SoHo and Greenwich Village in Manhattan. Along with Haynes, whom she married in 1997, Scamardo also founded Evil Teen Records and curates annual events like Hunter, N.Y.'s Mountain Jam and Asheville, N.C.'s Christmas Jam. Beyond that, she's a radio personality for SiriusXM's Jam On station. As she explains, "If you want something, you got to be willing to work for it."

You began your career at Island Records. How did that opportunity come about and how did it set you on your current path?

I came to New York in 1988 and started an internship at Island Records in 1989. It led to them hiring me full time, and I was there until '96. I was fortunate enough to work my way through the ranks of the A&R department, where I got to work with all of the A&R guys, overseeing and assisting different recording projects. I had only been there two months before I got my first credit on a record. I was really excited to dive in and work really closely with these artists, especially young artists in the early part of their careers. I got a chance to learn the ins and outs of signing, producing, recording and developing.

I also got to work on huge projects by some of my favorite bands, like U2 and PJ Harvey, as well as the Bob Marley reissues. It was an exciting and unique time to be at Island Records. They were the No. 1 hip-hop label when I got there in '89, with Young MC and Tone Lōc, and they were coming off of U2's *Joshua Tree,* Melissa Etheridge's first record and some other big releases. Shortly after I started, they were bought out by Polygram, and it was weird to go through that when I was so young. I remember calling my dad from the bathroom at Island and saying, "They're firing everybody and laying everybody off, and everybody is crying and upset, but no one fired me yet." And my dad goes, "They're not going to fire you—you don't make enough money to be fired." I remember walking out of the bathroom and thinking, "Alright, at least I won't lose my job."

In '94, while I was still at Island full time, I started my own company, Hard Head Productions & Management, working out of the bedroom in my apartment. In '96, I got my office on Varick Street, where it still is. Back then, it was just me and an assistant. We were working 12-14 hour days.

What was an early lesson that you learned?

Don't sweat the small stuff. One thing that you learn when you've got five tours on the road, along with a couple of artists in the studio and you're dealing with a bunch of record company people and agents is: Things can go wrong. If you let yourself get too flustered by it, then you won't be able to focus. I've learned to try to focus on solving the problems. There's a lot of moving parts and you can't let the little things stress you out because there are always a lot of little things going on in our world. You've got to be able to focus on your job. You can't let it get you down and you can't let it de-focus you off the issues at hand.

My early years in the '90s—I was young, I was hungry. We were out there, going to shows every night and trying to make stuff happen for our acts. I didn't have a ton of experience, and those are just lessons that took a few years to absorb.

Can you talk about how you became a radio host on SiriusXM's Jam On?

Lenny Bloch was Jam On's program director when it started. He came from a station called WDHA over in New Jersey and he was the program director for a few other stations at Sirius. There had never been a channel like Jam On, so it was a new concept. Lenny and I were friends because DHA was a big Gov't Mule supporter. Warren and I had been out there multiple times and spent time with Lenny—he was a DJ there as well as the program director. Around 2002, I was in San Francisco with Warren and Phil Lesh working on Phil's first solo record. We were recording, and I was the executive producer, which, to me, was a really big deal.

Lenny had been trying to call me and he finally reached me when I was back in my office in New York. He was like, "I want to offer you a job working at Sirius. They're starting this channel called Jam On, and I want you to be the voice of the channel." And I said, "Really? I've never done radio before." He said, "You have a great voice, you know everything about the scene and the last thing we want is a stock radio head for this channel. We want someone who's organic—who can talk to the audience and sound like they're alive and just be part of the scene." I got hired over the phone with no auditions. I got pretty lucky.

Can you share the story of the Allman Brothers Band show you attended in Maryland where you met your future husband, Warren Haynes?

I grew up in Northern Virginia but was living in New York. My best friend, Amy, and I had gone to Philly to see the Dead at JFK on a Friday [7/7/89] and woke up Saturday with not much to do. I said, "The Allman Brothers are playing down at Merriweather, but they haven't played in years and the show is sold out." Amy responded, "I love the Allman Brothers! Let's go—call them!"

This was before internet, and I picked up her house phone and called Merriweather Post Pavilion. The lady answered and I said, "Hi, my name is Stef. I'd like to buy two tickets for the Allman Brothers tonight." There was a little bit of a pause and then she said, "Well, this is your lucky day. There are 500 people that have been standing out here all day." Back then there was some loophole with the ticketing/telemarketing laws, so she told me, "By law, because I answered the phone, I have to sell you these two tickets that the band just handed in and disappoint the 500 people that

Continued on page 76

Danny Clinch

Jacklyn LaBranch

A classic JGB singer returns for another tour of duty with the Jerry Garcia Symphonic Celebration. BY DEAN BUDNICK

Bill McAlaine

WHEN THE JERRY Garcia Symphonic Celebration returned this summer, a familiar face accompanied Warren Haynes and company. Jacklyn LaBranch, who joined the Jerry Garcia Band in 1982 and remained a member through Garcia's death in 1995, contributed vocals on both legs of the tour. LaBranch's positive presence provided a direct link to the life and work of Garcia, as well as to their shared Bay Area origins.

You were living around the corner from the Grateful Dead in San Francisco when they moved into their house on 710 Ashbury St. in 1966.

The Grateful Dead moved into *my* neighborhood—that's what I always told Jerry. I loved Haight Street. You didn't have to go downtown; everything you needed was there: the movies, bowling, candy. It was just a great environment—Golden Gate Park, Kezar [Stadium]. Then, when the hippies came in, it got to the point in '67 where I was outside playing in my front yard and tour buses were driving around. The streets were crawling with all the people coming in, but it wasn't bad. We accepted it and went about our business. It was great. There were free concerts in the park in the Panhandle. And later, when I found out from Jerry that they had moved around the corner on Ashbury, it was like, "Wow, interesting." I can't stress enough how wonderful it was to grow up during that time—other than maybe the parking. Parking was always bad in that neighborhood. People complain about it now but parking was bad back then, too.

Did you ever see the Dead perform in the Panhandle?

Maybe. I was young and we didn't know the names of the bands. We would go down after church to the Panhandle, and there would be some musicians playing, but we didn't pay attention to who they were.

Your introduction to the Jerry Garcia Band came through Melvin Seals. How familiar were you with Jerry Garcia and his music at that time?

I wasn't familiar at all. Melvin asked me in '82. I was in a community choir and our director moved out of town. We never disbanded, but we kind of stopped singing, and I did some recording work with Melvin in his studio. He asked me if I was interested in singing with the band and I said, "Sure, why not?" That's how I got into it.

Then, Melvin and Dee Dee [Dickerson] and I started rehearsing the songs together. Music was music to me, so I didn't really question the music or the lyrics. I played in the orchestra and I always played the piano. I remember "Dear Prudence" and "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" were the ones I started with. I really liked singing them. Then, after we learned all the songs with Melvin, we rehearsed with the band. That's when I met Jerry and put it all together.

The first time it became real was at the first gig we did. I think it was at The Stone. We had to walk from the dressing room to the stage, and as I looked out, I said to myself: "Where did all these hippies come from? Where have they been?" [*Laughs*.]

I'll tell you, though, I really understood the love the Deadheads had for Jerry when he went into a diabetic coma [in 1986]. He was down for a while and his first gig back was not with the Grateful Dead, it was with us at The Stone. And when Jerry came out, you would have thought God himself had stepped out on that stage. It wasn't the yelling and shouting, it was the love in that room. It was palpable—you could feel it. They were so happy to have Jerry Garcia back. It was an experience I've never felt before or since.

How would you describe Jerry as a bandleader?

He was easy. He was a Leo—he was cool, he was chill. We'd rehearse, but he didn't rehearse things to death. We'd practice to get the general idea and then we'd finish it off at the gig. I thought he was underrated as far as the general music scene. I think because of the hippies and the Deadheads, people were put off by the music. But it's cohesive, it's rhythmic—it's good music. Even though a song might last two hours, it's good. [*Laughs*.] To this day, when I'm somewhere and music is playing, I can hear his guitar and say, "That sounds like Jerry."

This past summer, you toured with the Jerry Garcia Symphonic Celebration. How did that come about and what were some of the highlights?

The girl who normally did it [Alecia Chakour] was on tour [with Tedeschi Trucks Band] and Jerry's girls recommended me. I love the symphony behind us; it's so beautiful. It's different and the same. Warren Haynes is another great musician. He reminds me a lot of Jerry. I know he's not Jerry, but he flows right into it.

My favorite songs have been "Terrapin Station," "Scarlet Begonias" and "Bird Song," but it's still new to me, so I love them all. I went to Red Rocks for the first time and having Melvin there was fun. [Seals guested with the group for their Red Rocks gig on Garcia's birthday, August 1.]

You've kept a lower profile as of late, at least in terms of public performances. Do you still sing in your local choir?

Even when I was with Jerry, I always had a day job. When I got into the band, I was working for Wells Fargo, and I took a leave for six months, came back, and then I got fully vested for retirement so I stopped working for them. Someone told me I'd never find a permanent job that would let me go on tour, so I started working as a contractor because then I was in control, and when I would go on tour I could leave. But I was able to find jobs that would let me go on tour. What eventually happened after Jerry Garcia passed is I went back to school and got my AA [Associate of Arts degree], and then I went to California State University, East Bay and got my Bachelor of Science in computer science. In January 2000, I started working for Dreyer's Ice Cream, and then it got bought by Nestlé. I've been working with them ever since as an IT worker.

This past February, Melvin asked me and Gloria [Jones, fellow longtime JGB vocalist] to sing with him at The Warfield. She did, but I couldn't because I was going to Africa, an awesome trip I had been planning for a long while. He just asked me if I could do it next February, so I will.

I sing in the church choir and I fill in for another musician at another church when he's on vacation. I still play piano; I still sing. I have a little piano student. I'll always be involved in music, in one form or another, no matter what. Always.

Joseph
Sister Act

These days, it almost feels like a gimmick to start a band with your siblings, but a family act was truly the best vehicle for the Closner sisters' personal brand of organic folk-pop. Natalie, Meegan and Allison formed Joseph, named for their grandfather Jo and his hometown of Joseph, Ore., after realizing that they shared a common musical ground. The musicians had grown up listening to jazz and country, which taught them how to sing harmonies, and their collaborative sensibility is apparent on the group's charming new album, *I'm Alone, No You're Not*.

"A shared history impacts the sound and lyrics we create," Meegan says of the album, which was produced by Mike Mogis (Bright Eyes, Jenny Lewis). "We have very similar tastes in music and have a rich, similar history with different angles in which to pull from. If you're able to work through family roles, can learn to have grace while everyone grows and not expect each other to be who they've always been, it's an incredibly beautiful and rewarding experience."

The band, who recently performed at Bonnaroo and Glastonbury and will tour with James Bay this fall, wanted to convey sincerity in the album's lyrics, a feeling that is evident in the shimmering, folk-tinged indie-rock numbers. "If we can be honest with ourselves and what we are feeling and experiencing," Meegan notes, "likely someone else will be able to say: 'Me too.'

"Our record deals with themes we've referred to as 'the day cycle,'" she adds. "It deals with the hope of a new day, the questions in the middle of all of it, the fear during the nighttime, and the competing doubt and uncertainty whether a new day will come."

Musically, the Closner sisters accepted a lot of guidance from Mogis, whose credits encouraged them to enlist him as the producer of *I'm Alone, No You're Not*. "Initially, we loved his work, but what sealed the deal was his enthusiasm for working on our project. We wanted to work with someone who was going to have an equal amount of excitement and heart for the project as we did. Mike had that. We brought him individual songs that were sung with three vocals and a guitar, and he turned them into a full, cinematic, dynamic record."

Those songs continue to evolve in the band's live set, but the shared voices of the three sisters remain at the heart of everything Joseph does. "The live shows are about the magic of connectedness between you saying a truth and the chance that someone else at the show might feel less alone in theirs."

Emily Zemler

Margo Price
Major-Key Catharsis

"When I rolled out of town on the unpaved road/ I was 57 dollars from being broke." With this autobiographical couplet, Margo Price kicks off the first track on her recent solo debut, *Midwest Farmer's Daughter*, a collection of tunes that delves into the past and present of a singer-songwriter who was raised as part of a rural community in small-town Illinois and moved to Nashville at 20 to pursue her musical dreams. The album touches on the various hardships that Price faced before and after the move, including the loss of her family's farm, the struggle to make it in Music City, her battle with alcohol and even the loss of her first child—and that's all in the first song.

But the record isn't necessarily a downer, at least not musically. "As depressing and as dark as the topics are on the album, there's hardly any minor chords," she says. That juxtaposition is part of why Price sees writing and playing music as cathartic experiences in trying times. "I felt like it was therapeutic for me," she says of the record. "Music and performing have always been that way. It's a bit of an escape, to perform and feel happy."

After overcoming all of those troubles—along with the breakup of her former band, Buffalo Clover—and turning her struggles into a record, Price finally found a label that was excited to release her music, Jack White's Third Man Records. "It was really a blessing. Everybody there is so nice, so supportive—just the best people," she says. "They've turned my mind around about evil people in the music business."

Price affirms that despite the Nashville rat race, there's a small-town, neighborly vibe to the city as well. "There is a camaraderie and a lot of people collaborate, but there still is this jealousy and competitiveness, for sure," Price says. "But there's a great spirit in competitiveness—that's why The Beatles were so amazing, right? John and Paul were so competitive. It's a beautiful place, and I've always had a lot of love for it. As much as I rag on it, it's definitely home."

Matt Inman

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DEEP ROOTS MOUNTAIN REVIVAL

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5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Hayley Jane & The Primates BOSTON

THEATRICAL FOLKADELIC AMERICANA

Hayley Jane was only 12 years old when she informed her friends and family that she would prefer to be called exclusively by her first and middle names. It was a product of her then-newfound love for all things simian, and a tribute to her new hero, Jane Goodall. "I was just absolutely obsessed with apes and monkeys when I was little," the singer says. "It was after I saw the picture of the evolution of man [Rudolph Zallinger's *March of Progress*]. I was raised Christian—my parents are born-again Christians—and it just blew my mind. I became really enamored with the relationship between apes and humans." So when it came time to name her barely formed project, **Hayley Jane & The Primates**, before their debut performance, she decided on a moniker that would serve as both an homage to her former obsession and allow for a continually evolving group of musicians to support her. And while the band's cast of characters has changed over the years since they first came together around the Berklee College of Music scene, the star of the show has always been Hayley Jane, who boasts a strong background in musical theater and brings that flair to the stage with every performance. Now, with a steadily solidifying lineup that includes bassist **Josh Carter**, guitarists **Justin Hancock** and **Greg Smith**, drummer **Ryan Clausen** and the band's namesake supplying lead vocals and washboard, the ensemble is fully immersed in the Northeast grassroots scene thanks to their blend of folk, Americana, country, blues and pop. Hayley Jane relishes the company, even if she's usually in the minority, demographics-wise. "The music world, in general, is dominated by men, but I think that's especially true in the jam scene," she says. But the singer is taking the challenge head-on and is looking forward to continuing what she calls the "genre-crazy" style of that was the ticket for her band, even though The Primates don't embark on many extended improvisations. "The challenge is to not try to put a box around the jam scene, either. I'm just happy we found a scene where we're so welcome. I feel like we've found a home." hayleyjaneandtheprimates.com ***Matt Inman***

A-WA SHAHARUT, ISRAEL

DESERT VIBES

As a trio of harmonizing Israeli sisters who sing in the Yemeni Arabic dialect, **A-WA** certainly cross more than a few modern barriers with their music. To oversimplify geopolitics, the Arabic-speaking world is generally not receptive to cultural products from Israel and, at the same time, the Israeli audience is often hesitant to embrace music sung in Arabic. The divide is an old and stubborn one, but it's something the sisters have set out to erode with their funky and stylish music—a mix that draws on ancient desert traditions and of-the-moment urban styles. The video for their first single, "Habib Galbi," the title track off A-WA's full-length debut released this summer, has drawn admirers from all over the world. "Growing up in a small and isolated village in the desert has made us use our imagination and creativity all the time," says **Liron Haim**. She says that as kids they sang with the wind, made up songs, drummed on pans and recorded their efforts. The sisters absorbed the culture of their grandparents, who were Jews from Yemen—and, while visiting family in Gedera, they connected with the larger Yemenite community. The desert, DIY vibe comes through in A-WA's music, particularly in the sisters' close and agile harmonies, but it's filtered through a vibrant club aesthetic, with pulsing beats and synths. "We believe in being authentic and true to ourselves," says Liron. "We made a decision to sing old folk songs in the Yemeni Arabic dialect because we love it and feel strongly connected to it." Her sister **Tagel** adds, "We drew a lot of inspiration from the simplicity and minimalism." After successful trips to the U.S. this year, including a memorable stop at SXSW, the siblings are already thinking about their next record, which they hope will further broaden their audience. "We are very optimistic," says Tagel, "and truly believe in the power of music to transcend conflicts and differences."

a-wamusic.com ***John Adamian***

Andrew Scott Blackstein (Hayley Jane)

Anna Graceman

NASHVILLE, TENN.

ALASKAN WUNDERKIND

When **Anna Graceman** was nine years old, she was invited to appear on Ellen DeGeneres' nationally televised talk show. At 11, she appeared on *America's Got Talent*. When she was 13, Graceman performed nearly 50 shows as part of a residency at the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas. This was hardly a run-of-the-mill adolescence, but Graceman has stayed grounded through it all, remembering where she came from and how it all started. "I grew up in Alaska, so you didn't go outside much," she says. "You learned to enjoy being inside. I could actually sit through a 30-minute lesson at the age of four because I loved it." The now 16-year-old singer-songwriter, who has recently begun to make her mark in Nashville, writes and produces all her own songs and, over the past couple of years, has brought her younger siblings onboard to form a trio they call **Graceman**. Despite her career's early start, Graceman admits that her path to stardom wasn't always easy. "Being young, you're self-conscious—especially being a young girl—and being in the eyes of so many people, you doubt yourself," she says. "You've just got to believe in yourself and know that the things that are happening right now are important, but the things that happen in the future are more important."

annagraceman.com ***Matt Inman***

Mothers ATHENS, GA.

AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

"It's been a hell of a year," **Kristine Leschper** says as she checks in from the Upstate New York Airbnb where her Athens, Ga.-based quartet **Mothers** have gathered to prepare their sophomore record. Leschper, **Matthew Anderegg** (drums), **Drew Kirby** (guitar) and new bassist **Chris Goggans** are days away from stepping onstage at Lollapalooza, a mere six months after releasing their debut record, *When You Walk a Long Distance You Are Tired*. "I feel so lucky," she reflects. "We all are pretty overwhelmed by what we've done in the past year." Leschper—who conceived the experimental, folky, indie outfit as a solo project in 2013—cut her songwriting teeth in the intimate and, as she says, "incredibly supportive" musical community of the Classic City. "I always felt really included," she says of the college town's close-knit community. "The bar is set really high in Athens. Everybody is trying pretty hard. There isn't a lot of mediocre music happening there." After teaming up with Anderegg and Kirby (Goggans replaced bassist Patrick Morales), Mothers started barnstorming the alt-rock club circuit and signed to tastemakers Grand Jury Music. "People have been able to relate to how much of myself I put into that first record," Leschper says of the group's populist approach. "So many of the things I was talking about were issues that so many people go through. People just see some of themselves in it."

nestingbehavior.com ***Rob Slater***

Noveller BROOKLYN, N.Y.

POST-POP NOISE SWOONS

On **Noveller**'s *Fantastic Planet*, guitarist **Sarah Lipstate** bends and refracts melodies, filtering her instrument through an extensive chain of pedals and often blurring the essential *sound* of the guitar. As a teenager, she was drawn to the rock abstractions of Sonic Youth, which led to her devising her own approach to the guitar. "I just wanted to make noise with an electric guitar," Lipstate says. "I wasn't really interested in learning how to play in a traditional sense." In 2011, she began releasing music as Noveller, and her ambient, swooning passages quickly scored Lipstate big-name fans like Iggy Pop, who invited her to open a series of dates on his *Post Pop Depression* tour. Though Lipstate's atmospheric, instrumental sound might seem at odds with Pop's proto-to-post-punk rock, he likely recognized a kindred aesthetic leanness in her work. She often makes her guitar sound like a synthesizer or strings, but she's still drawn to the singular relationship she has with a guitar as her primary compositional tool. "I realized instead of just collecting instruments and pedals, if you just really spend time with what you have—get to know your instrument and your tools—you can really go deep and create some sounds that are exciting to you."

sarahlipstate.com ***Jason Woodbury***

Alana Rocklin

STS9's new bassist surveys their first album in eight years—and first since the departure of founding member David Murphy

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

ACROSS THE *UNIVERSE*

The Universe Inside is a concept record; it's a journey. It's an effort to try and put this energy that we're feeling into the world. It's a personal record. It's about the universe inside of all of us—how we relate as people, the notion that we're all made out of stardust. It's about the journey of life and how up and down that is—this common thread we all have as humans and really trying to reflect that with the music. We're all made of the same things.

We've worked on lots of songs as a group since I joined [in 2014]. Some of them were ideas that had been started before David Murphy left the band, but we developed and changed those ideas together. The thread was really obvious to us from the get-go. We had an intentional energy and vibe before we pared things down to what we really wanted to say. It runs the gamut. Some songs are total funk—a new spin on this Michael Jackson/Quincy Jones energy. Then, there are ideas that are complete collages and snippets—pieces of life. One song's an improvisation, us creating in the moment. It turned out so cool that we left it on there. It's meant to be something that you put on and listen to all the way through on this journey. We recorded it mostly in our studio in Santa Cruz with my husband Brad Bowden co-producing and engineering. It was great to just get back to recording together—it was mixed at our studio by Brad and Hunter [Brown].

HIGH FIDELITY

We've played a lot of new material since I joined the band—some of which is on the record, most of which is not. We want people to hear the majority of the songs for the first time when they listen to the album. We took our time and re-recorded certain things to make sure they sounded like what we heard in our heads. The fidelity is amazing. But it's also music that we feel can be played live—music that can be explored. The band's improvisational aspect is what brought us together when we met in 2001—the notion that you could have these sections and vibes that were based around a dance feel but are improvisations. I see myself as an improviser, first and foremost. That's where the band is rooted, so a very natural thing happened when I joined. We just started going there.

ALANA'S ORIGIN STORY

I've played bass since I was eight and upright bass since I was 10. I ended up pursuing classical studies at the University of Michigan but, a year or so into that, I switched my major to jazz. From there, I made music my career and, right after school, formed a band with my husband. At that time, we were living in Chicago and released a record under the name The All Rectangle—Fareed Haque is on it. Somebody passed it to [STS9 percussionist] Jeffree Lerner, and we opened for Sector 9 during one of their first Chicago shows. That's where we met. We just fell in love with each other's music right away. It was one of those moments—you're younger and you connect with people in this really different way. There was this mutual appreciation from that day forward and we stayed in touch. Brad and I had different incarnations of our band—one with Johnny Neel—and opened for STS9 during their first run at the Tabernacle in Atlanta. I'd moved to Nashville by that time and started playing with Jeff Coffin. Brad was working for Futureman, making drum sounds, but we were always sending music to the STS9 guys. Eventually, they signed our band, sub-ID, to [their label] 1320. Before they asked me to join the band, I had been playing with Jim James in his solo group.

"NEW DAWN, NEW DAY"

Even if you're good friends, it's never easy to transition into a band like this, but our friendship made it easier. There's a natural period where it's a little uncomfortable. You have to find each other. It's important to have that phase where you are really feeling each other out. Thankfully, we were able to take time to do that. I'm a fan of the band and have been for a long time. The music means so much to me; the songs are important to me. I wanted to make sure I was doing everything possible to honor what the band had accomplished—what I heard in my head as a fan. I spent time preparing before we came together for a couple months of rehearsal. It was really casual and relaxed. Sometimes we would improvise; sometimes we would just talk. It was important for us to feel good, feel comfortable, before that first show. It just shot off from there, and we were just able to have fun and just let go. "New Dawn, New Day" was the first song that we wrote together. There was a conscious effort to write a song that really reflected what we wanted to put out there and play it at our first show.

IMPROVISE AND IMPROVE

People ask if I [was the reason STS9 has brought back so many songs], but it was a group effort. Everybody had songs they wanted to revisit. When I first came in to rehearse, Zach [Velmer] brought out "Poseidon." "Potamus" was a song I loved and asked to play. Since I've been in the band, everybody has had different songs that they wanted to revisit or even just improve on. There are songs that people probably don't think of as "bustouts" that we've revamped and worked on. We've tried to take the time to do that for a while—we have a whole list of them that we still haven't gotten to.

Sara Watkins

Young in All the Wrong Ways

BY DEAN BUDNICK

"THIS IS AN ALBUM THAT chronicles a period in my life when I was doing some course correction," Sara Watkins reflects on the genesis of her new record, *Young in All the Wrong Ways*. "I think everyone does course correction every few months, or every few years. You look around and think, 'Huh, I didn't mean to still be here, but I guess I am.' Then you have to make adjustments. Maybe it's moving or maybe it's changing your job or just adjusting your lifestyle or cutting out a food. For me, I found myself in a place where I realized, 'I don't want to be here for the rest of my life. Where do I want to be? How do I get there?' That turned up a little turbulence that I wanted to embrace as a positive thing because it meant I was changing; I was moving forward. Someone told me that the album sounds pessimistic, but, for me, it's the exact opposite. It's realizing that every morning is a new day and it's not too late to change."

Watkins recruited producer and Punch Brothers fiddler Gabe Witcher to help her explore these themes. The pair first met when the 35-year-old Watkins was just eight and already distinguishing herself as a fiddle player, en route to forming Nickel Creek with her brother Sean and Chris Thile (who currently fronts Punch Brothers). Witcher and Watkins later reconnected when she was in her twenties, performing with Sean in Watkins Family Hour. "There's something I really enjoyed about the fact that Gabe hasn't produced a ton of records," Watkins explains. "I wanted to work with somebody who was discovering his or her process with me. Gabe also knew me really well, and we have a common appreciation for moments that might not be precise but are very compelling. He was a really great teammate on this project." That team also included fellow Punch Brother Chris Eldridge (acoustic guitar), Jay Bellerose (drums) and Paul Kowert (double bass), as well as a multitude of guests such as Jim James, Benmont Tench, Sarah Jarosz and Aoife O'Donovan.

YOUNG IN ALL THE WRONG WAYS

This was one of the first songs in the batch that I wrote. It also made sense for it to be the first song on the record because it sets the tone quite well. That tone is the realization that I didn't mean to be in this valley for quite this long and that I was not going to be there anymore. I wrote the song while I was realizing this in my own life, and it seemed to be a good way to start the album.

THE LOVE THAT GOT AWAY

"The Love That Got Away" is the only song on the album in which I play the ukulele. I was playing this descending line on the uke one day, and I was thinking about some friends. It's a song about how complicated life can be. In theme with this course correction, it's about how someone got to this place in life. This song doesn't resolve things in a way that's necessarily optimistic, but I think if you are going to face the future and embrace the unknown, you have to come to terms with the alternatives. Do I want to stay in this institution or this belief system I know very well or do I want to consider that I might be wrong?

ONE LAST TIME

This is the only older song on the record. I wrote it with my friend Jon Foreman years ago. I had been playing it live, but it didn't really fit on a record until now. I started writing this one on fiddle, strumming out chords and singing. It started out much higher and Jon wrote the bridge, which got too high, so then I lowered the rest of the song but kept the high, high bridge. This song is about wising up to people and realizing that "Maybe this is not the same thing for you as it is for me. Peace out." [*Laughs.*] I used to call this one "My Kisses," but, now, it's called "One Last Time," and I think that title fits the content of the song a little better.

Jim James sings harmony on this one. We wanted a male harmony on it, and we tried to figure out who it would be. It's a silly song and he's got a sense of humor, so I emailed him and asked him if he would be interested, along with an MP3 of the song as we had it. Two hours later, he sent back two passes at the harmony, both of which we ended up using. It was amazing. Man, what a pro. He was like, "Absolutely, I'll do it. Here it is—if you like it, great. If it doesn't work, no sweat—don't worry about it, no harm done." I love that he's on it.

MOVE ME

One time, I was flying over the coast of Florida into Miami at night. The Florida landscape is full of bays and nooks and crannies and curves. But the tip of Florida seemed a square and, because of the streetlights, it looked like a grid. That's what we do; we try to find the straightest way from Point A to Point B. If you look around in the world, straight lines are hard to find. That's also true for the lines between right and wrong and between these so-called "black and white" issues that a lot of us were taught when we were kids because that's all our little brains could handle.

In life as a grown-up, we continue to realize, "Oh, this isn't a black and white issue. There's so much in-between these two sides." A lot of this album is me just navigating the in-between and not wanting to be pulled north or south or east or west, but trying to find my own way.

LIKE NEW YEAR'S DAY

"Like New Year's Day" depicts going out to a desert. The desert for me is a very special place because I grew up in San Diego and I live in Los Angeles. The desert is never far away, always getting closer. We used

Continued on Page 79

Tedeschi Trucks Band

Tedeschi Trucks Band ramped up their Wheels of Soul tour for another highly collaborative summer. Los Lobos and North Mississippi Allstars joined the 2016 edition of the caravan, which crossed the nation from early July into August. As these photos from TTB's Susan Tedeschi and Elizabeth Lea suggest, it was quite the (extended) family vacation with Susan and Derek's daughter, Sophia, and Derek's parents, Chris and Debbie, participating in the action, along with the other TTB members: Kofi Burbridge, Tyler Greenwell, J. J. Johnson, Mike Mattison, Mark Rivers, Kebbi Williams, Tim Lefebvre, Ephraim Owens and Alecia Chakour.

Lea: Pre-gig rehearsals are always a blast!

Lea: Mark, Mike and Alecia at Red Rocks—it's the greatest treat playing with this angelic section every night.

Tedeschi: Derek and Col. Bruce Hampton backstage in Alpharetta, Ga.

Lea: Side-stage view of Sue, Cesar [Rosas, Los Lobos] and Derek killin' "The Sky Is Crying" at Red Rocks—what an unforgettable evening!

Tedeschi: Sophia putting Tim's hair in a bun for the show in Tulsa, Okla.—Sophia was Tim's hair stylist for the summer tour.

Tedeschi: Derek and Charlie hanging out backstage before the Cincinnati show.

Tedeschi: Wayne Forte, our agent, with Chuck Morris, our Red Rocks promoter, and myself on stage at Red Rocks after soundcheck.

Tedeschi: Falcon [Tyler Greenwell] and J.J. outside the hotel in Ohio—these two are in charge of cooking the meat and starting the tailgating.

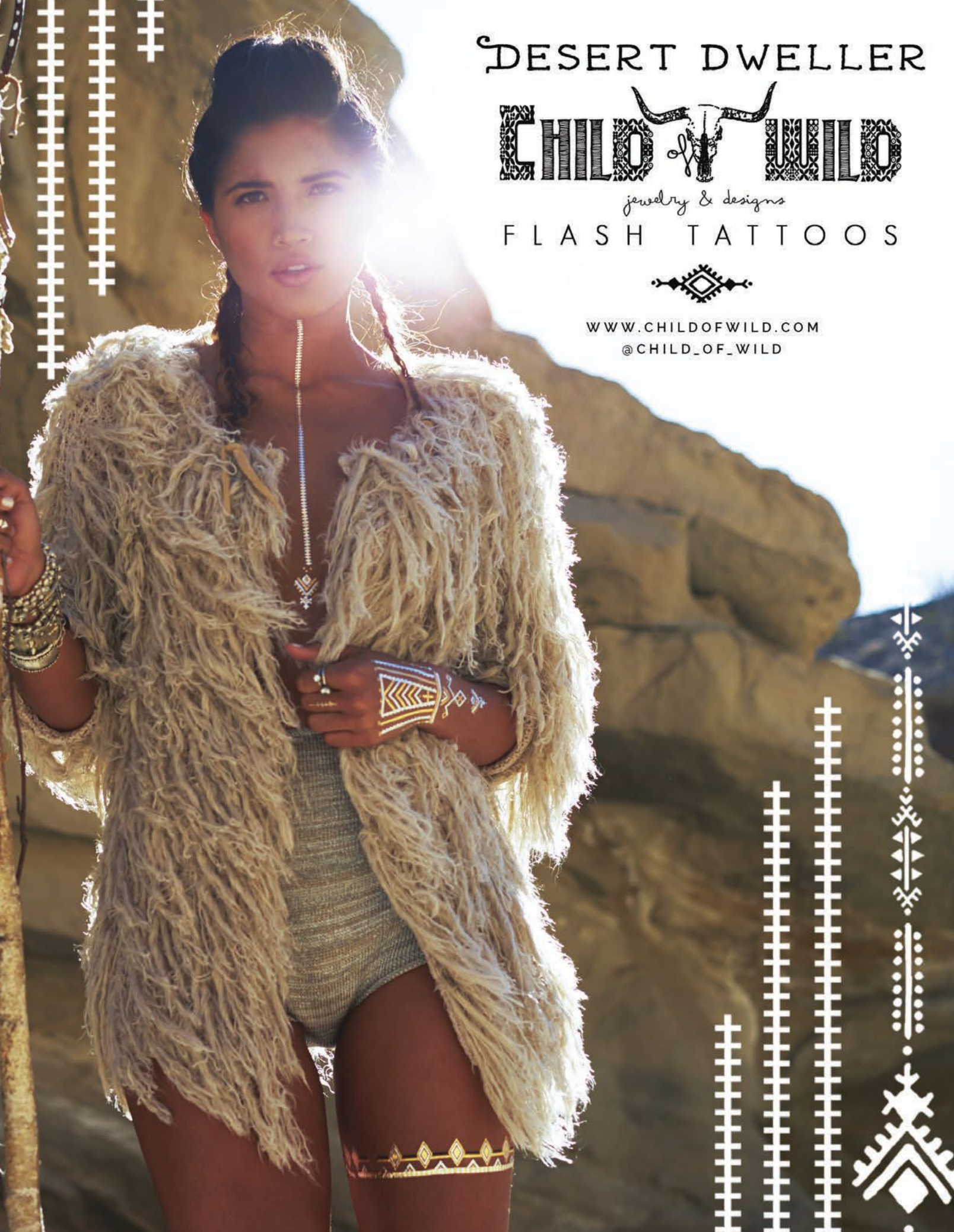
Tedeschi: Mike cooking some hot dogs and Falcon keeping up with the cooking and cleaning while talking with Chris Trucks—tailgating outside the hotel in Ohio with Old Red, one of our band buses, in the background.

Tedeschi: Mark, Alecia and Ephraim at soundcheck in Salt Lake City, with Chris Bedry—one of our fantastic crew members—in the background.

Tedeschi: The girls of the band backstage at the Brady Theater in Tulsa—supposedly this is where the Mad Dogs & Englishmen tour started in 1970.

Tedeschi: Derek, [studio engineer] Bobby Tis, [guitar technician] Ryan Murphy and Kofi checking out a guitar amp at soundcheck in Salt Lake City.

Tedeschi: Debbie Trucks and Cody Dickinson from North Mississippi Allstars tailgating in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.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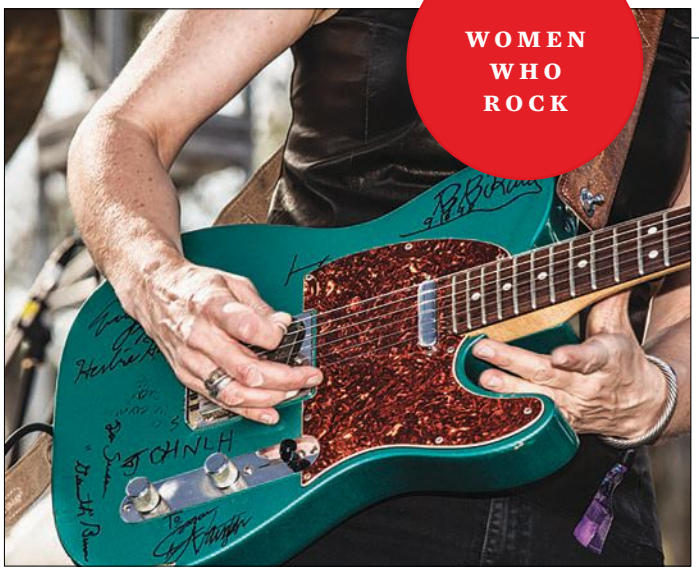


Jay Blakesberg

IT'S ABOUT THE MUSIC.

This remains our rallying cry more than 40 years after *Relix*'s launch. The artists who appear in the pages of the magazine are selected because they move and inspire us. This is true of our current issue, which also places a particular focus on those women whose work we find exhilarating. While the performers provided the catalyst, our sales team of Olivia Millman, Colby Casoria and Angela Ribbler supplied a collective enthusiasm for the subject matter.

OLIVIA MILLMAN: It's no secret that the music industry is mostly a man's world. When I decided to pursue my passion and work in music, I was told that success in the music industry is hard, but success in the industry as a woman is even harder. And yet, since starting at *Relix* almost two years ago, I am inspired by women daily. You have to be a badass to be a babe in this biz, both as an artist and also as someone making things happen behind the scenes.

When I think of women who rock, I think of Janis Joplin, Stevie Nicks and Joni Mitchell. I think of Grace Potter, Nicki Bluhm, Brittany Howard, Jen Hartswick and Natalie Cressman. My personal favorite right now is Courtney Barnett, who *really* rocks hard. But I also think of the women who are breaking boundaries daily in my life. I think of my mom, who went back to work when she was encouraged to stay at home with the kids when my brother and I were young. I think of my boss and our all-female sales team, as well as a handful of female crew and production managers I've met along the way—women who are doing what they love because they have found their way to thrive in "a man's world."

The ever-evolving perception of women in the workplace continues to grow, and this is more relevant now than ever, with a female presidential nominee for the first time in history! So this month's theme tugs at my heartstrings not only because I'm a woman, but also because now's the time to spread love to the ladies.

ANGELA RIBBLER: I've been a musician since the age of five which is a gift I took for granted most of my life. I never considered myself a *female* musician. Rather, I was simply a musician with just as much opportunity to embrace my passion as any other person, regardless of gender. I grew up playing violin alongside my mother, and was taught by a female violin teacher—a woman who remains one of the biggest and most positive influences in my life. I grew up at the peak of teen-pop's popularity, with artists like the Spice Girls, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera and the Dixie Chicks. Still, my family possesses strong Motown roots and introduced me early on to the talents of Diana Ross and The Supremes, Gladys Knight and Tina Turner. However, the most prominent "she rocks" moment I can recall was the moment I first heard Stevie Nicks sing "Dreams," and learned to never let a heartbreak keep you down.

Working in the music industry, though, I've undergone a shift in perception. I no longer take for granted what it means to be a woman in music. Not only because of the amount of female artists I come across, but also because the truth is that the amount of female figures in music is extremely unbalanced. I find it relevant and necessary to highlight those women who keep the music industry rocking. I've been extremely blessed since first entering this industry to have worked with a slew of incredible female musicians spanning many genres. However, I am aware this isn't the norm.

I firmly believe that it's more important to highlight and honor an individual's accomplishments without first categorizing them based on gender, race, sexuality or any other demographic that may otherwise define them. We are in an industry that heavily influences an audience of all demographics. Young boys and girls look up to artists as role models, something I also recall doing as a child. So, we must make it a priority to tip the scales, balancing the male-to-female ratio within the music industry, and let strong female role models shine in respect to making music and what goes on behind the scenes. This is, after all, the only way to ensure that the industry keeps rocking on and on for generations to come.

COLBY CASORIA: The sound of the female vocalist resonated with me at a very young and impressionable age, paving the way for what would become a life of endless music discovery. I have vivid memories spending time driving with my mother on the freeway, singing our hearts out to the soul-crushingly beautiful ballads of Whitney Houston. Some of my first live music experiences included Cher, Blondie and The B-52's, all before I was 11 years old. Soon after, a friend introduced me to the eccentric spirits and brilliant lyricism of Amy Winehouse and Regina Spektor, only furthering my desire to dive deeper. I explored the likes of Susan Tedeschi, Janis Joplin, Etta James, Florence Welch, Rachael Price and Lucius. I grew up during the rise of the hypnotic Stefani Germanotta (Lady Gaga), a woman who pushed the defined limits of what a popular female musician could be by showcasing her raw talent in a radical way. As of late, the most influential sound for me is that of the soulful Southern blues artist Maggie Koerner whose live performance remains forever imprinted on my soul.

A powerful female vocalist invites you to enjoy, experience and feel deeply, and it can be a hauntingly beautiful thing. If I am able to catch a glimpse of myself in the artist and see bits of my life in their lyrics, then the experience becomes profoundly relatable and sparks a unifying connection with an intoxicating grip. I feel fortunate to share a lifetime with these visionary females who defy the odds of success and set the bar high for musical creativity in a male-dominated industry. Women deserve equal recognition and celebration for their achievements and so, *Relix*'s "Women Who Rock" issue was born. These ladies influence the dreams of young girls aspiring to leave their marks on the world, the same way my role models did for me—and this is what we aim to highlight. To all the women who never cease to amaze, this issue is for you.

WOMEN WHO ROCK

Amanda Shires

No longer simply known as a Texas fiddler, the 34 year old has blossomed into a triple threat—musician, mother, poet—but she's still a music geek at heart. BY ROB SLATER

"It took me six times before I could stand up correctly," Amanda Shires says with a laugh as she reflects on her experiences playing shows with country and folk legend John Prine. On September 30, the two will share the stage once again at Nashville's famed Ryman Auditorium, where Shires will sample tracks from her latest release, *My Piece of Land,* before the iconic Prine hits the stage. "You get around them and you don't know what to say," she jokes of meeting her musical idols. "You forget your questions and all the words leave your face."

As her recent social media activity—including tweets from a Radiohead concert at Madison Square Garden and gushing Instagram photos of family time with her daughter backstage at the Grand Ole Opry—surely proves, Shires isn't afraid to still geek out a bit about musical heroes like Ryan Adams, whom she opened for during a stretch of shows this summer, including a festive outing at New York's Central Park SummerStage in July. "He's one of the best," Shires says, recalling an April 2015 gig at the Ryman when she and husband Jason Isbell sat in with Adams for the Whiskeytown classic "Jacksonville Skyline" and "16 Days."

Shires admits that her memory of that night is foggy, due to her intense Adams fandom ("I was kind of like, 'How do you make a C chord? Dammit, what's happened to me?!'"), and also because much has happened since that night in Shires' new adopted home of Nashville. Shires was about four months pregnant when she joined Adams onstage, and she would soon break from her usual slot in Isbell's band, The 400 Unit, to prepare for the birth of their first child, daughter Mercy, who arrived on Sept. 1, 2015.

Being "encumbered" by her pregnancy, as she puts it, spawned *My Piece of Land,* her latest fiddle-and-ukulele-driven solo record.

"I had done everything I could think of as far as nesting," Shires explains of the cabin fever that grew when she departed from life on the road. "I ran out of distractions and started having to face myself and started writing just to write and play music. A few songs started becoming a collection."

Unsure of whether or not she actually wanted to release the tunes—a batch that she says truly hones her writing style as "dealing with my own problems and emotions"—Shires phoned producer Dave Cobb, whose discography includes Isbell's *Southeastern* and *Something More Than Free,* and asked if he'd be interested in taking on the project. "I just needed some stuff to do and, sure enough, it became a record," she said.

As she surveys the final product, Shires points to the flamenco-guitar-infused "Slippin'," born out of "hormone-induced anxiety" (She sings: "Tonight could be the night you go slipping away from me") that was ultimately quelled by Isbell. "I played it for him and he was like, 'That's a good song, but you know that's not true. Everything is fine here.' In that way, it was helpful and, after I had the baby, those feelings went back to a normal range."

Shires grew up in Lubbock, a small city in Northwest Texas best known for being the home of Texas Tech University and music legend Buddy Holly. She initially gravitated to the violin and played in her school orchestra, but admits that the conservative setting bored her. In college, she started expanding her musical breadth and explored roots music, joining the Texas Playboys and Thrift Store Cowboys. Shires also began sitting in regularly at Lubbock Americana safe-haven The Blue Light, where she came across one of the original country-music outlaws, Billy Joe Shaver, who told her to move from being a sideperson to frontwoman and pursue songwriting.

"He thought I had something," she says, while also noting that, in Texas, "I couldn't get away from the side person. My name is attached to just being a fiddle player, so I moved to Nashville and started waiting tables and recording records. And here we sit."

Shires admits that her first forays into the competitive Nashville scene included "lots of trial and error." As she recounts, "You have to find what it is that you really want to do. I recommend doing that before you move here, but if you want to do music, you probably ought to know what kind of music you want to do because you might wind up every Wednesday playing covers, like I did for a little while. And that wasn't what I wanted to do."

Today, Shires is clearly following her own muse, dividing her time between her music, family and a master's degree program in poetry through The University of the South in Tennessee. She says the decision to pursue that degree came from "nerdy things" like "what to read, how to edit, why one word over another." Shires faces the challenge like she does most things in her life—with an infectious laugh and a sense of humor, saying, "I love Middle English. James Joyce is my spirit animal—not."

Angel Olsen

WOMEN WHO ROCK

On her third full-length, *My Woman*, the the 29-year-old St. Louis native turns up the heat with a little soul power. BY BILL MURPHY

LET'S MAKE IT CLEAR right off the bat: Angel Olsen does not listen to Joni Mitchell. Sure, as a singer-songwriter, she feels some level of kinship with the folk-rock songstress, and she might even acknowledge the "steely vulnerability" of Mitchell's music as a quality that resonates in her own work. But Olsen's muses are a quirky bunch. From The Velvet Underground, Leonard Cohen and Neil Young to the Chi-Lites, Jackie DeShannon and Candi Staton, the 29-year-old St. Louis native draws from a wealth of influences to create songs that burrow under your skin and cut straight to the marrow of life and love.

With her stunning voice—at times wounded and mystical, at others stoic and fierce—Olsen managed to recast indie-rock Americana in her own image on 2014's *Burn Your Fire for No Witness*, which surged on the strength of the hauntingly Orbison-esque rocker "Hi-Five" and the chilling ballad "Windows," among others. She recorded that album in Asheville, N.C., where she now lives—a far cry from the bustling Chicago scene that she called home for seven years.

"When I wrote *Burn Your Fire*, I was thinking I had experienced all these heavy things in life," Olsen says with an uneasy laugh. "I thought about myself when I was 16 reading Kierkegaard for the first time, or reading existentialist novels and trying to grasp that sense of being isolated, unfeeling and separated. And it's cool that I knew how to articulate those ideas, but I didn't even know that it was gonna get 10 times worse."

She checks herself, then laughs a bit more openly. "This time, though, I feel more relaxed about the things that have disappointed me, in a new way," she reveals, referring to her mindset during the making of her latest album, *My Woman* (Jagjaguwar). "It's not like, 'This is the end,' you know? Some of it is very autobiographical, and other things—songs like 'Intern' and 'Shut Up Kiss Me,' the playful ones—I probably could have written years ago in my head. They're all honest, in my opinion, but it's on side B where I feel more like I'm shedding part of myself in those songs."

Side B, to use the old-school vinyl term, is where *My Woman* gets heavy and soulful. Recording to tape at the famed Vox Studios in Hollywood, Olsen and co-producer Justin Raisen sought to capture her band—Stewart Bronaugh (guitar), Emily Elhaj (bass) and Joshua Jaeger (drums)—at their well-rehearsed peak. There's a deep, intuitive sense of musicians actually *connecting* in songs like the baleful, country-tinged "Sister" and the epic, psychedelic "Woman," which features Olsen playing an echo-drenched Mellotron to embellish Bronaugh's haunted Wurlitzer organ, as well as a snake-bitten solo by guest guitarist Seth Kauffman.

"It just was such an organic, wonderful experience," Olsen says. "Being able to communicate the percussiveness of a voice in a band—that's the number one thing that I have to do all the time. And to meet people who get that is so rare. It's just cliché to say it, but I felt like we were making history. We were allowing ourselves to play everything live and see what happens, instead of trying to put the record together in a specific way."

Along with her newfound interest in synthesizers, which she explores to the hilt on the '80s-washed opener "Intern," Olsen also tests the limits of her voice. She hits the high notes with commitment and power on the rocking, raucous "Not Gonna Kill You," and then dials back into a wavering whisper on "Those Were the Days." Channeling her soul heroes (Candi Staton among them) wasn't necessarily part of the initial plan, but she felt there was a side of her voice that she hadn't tapped into yet.

"That was a hidden challenge for me with this record," she explains. "Yes, I care about writing, and I care about saying something important. But, sometimes, you don't need to say anything. You just need to *sing*. That can be refreshing after hearing a lot of words, you know? Sometimes just doing the same grunge song over and over again isn't gonna drive it home the same way. I really want to keep experimenting with that."

Through it all, Olsen admits to having a chip on her shoulder, which is part of what makes *My Woman* such an intriguing mystery. Who is this elusive woman, anyway, and is she making a feminist statement? Not exactly.

"I'm calling it *My Woman*, and it's a bold move, and people can think whatever they want," Olsen says matter-of-factly. "That's cool. It's not a feminist record. I'm not afraid to talk about feminism, but it's not really the subject of all my material. I will say, for the first time, I'm allowing myself to be part of the story. To be a writer and to articulate things, you have to admit that those things have affected you. I often overthink it and maybe get myself into trouble. My mom basically is like, 'You're just always looking for something to complain about.' And then people ask me, 'Well, what if you became a mom and your life changed, and you were happy. Would your music change?' I don't know, but I'll tell you one thing: I'll still have stuff to say about it."

amdo photo

WOMEN WHO ROCK

THE STORY OF

THE GHOST UNIT

Van Ghost have been one of the jamband world's best-kept secrets for years—and after releasing their new studio album, they may become known as one of the scene's best supergroups.

BY MATT INMAN

"PEOPLE IN A ROOM making music together with real instruments." That's how Michael Harrison Berg paraphrases the words that were written on a whiteboard in the studio where his Van Ghost project tracked their new album, *The Ghost Unit*, in late December 2014. Staying true to that mantra, Berg, along with co-lead singer and trumpet player Jennifer Hartswick and an all-star cast of musicians, laid down the record in six collaboration-fueled, family-rooted days that revitalized a group whose last recording endeavor, Berg says, "put a dagger in the band, at least temporarily."

Those words on the whiteboard were actually written by Trey Anastasio while he was recording his most recent album with his solo band, at the same studio where Van Ghost tracked their sessions—Anastasio's Barn in Vermont, which has hosted an impressive stream of artists in its almost two decades in operation, from Phish to Béla Fleck and Patty LaBelle. And, now, Van Ghost.

Hartswick, a longtime member of Trey Anastasio Band, is certainly no stranger to The Barn, a place that she calls "a second home," and where she's spent a great deal of time over the past 16 years. This time around, she and Van Ghost entered the storied space to record *The Ghost Unit* a week before Christmas, as the Vermont winter began in earnest and when, as Hartswick puts it, "everybody was feeling extra lovey and it was snowy and delicious up there. It really is a special place. There's nothing sterile about it—it's very homey."

"It's not a traditional studio where the producer is behind a glass window," adds Berg. "It's literally a big fucking barn. Everything is open and you are in one big room together. And even though, from a modern engineering world [perspective], that's actually a challenge to recording, on a human level, it's everything we wanted. It puts everybody in the same energy and in the same collective consciousness at the same time."

Berg, who has worked as a promoter in Chicago since the early aughts, had

Zach Nelson

his first experience at The Barn over a decade ago while overseeing a session with a group he was managing at the time. Coincidentally, it was an offhand quip from a frustrated band member that helped Berg make the decision to attempt a jump to the creative side of the music business.

"It started to get kind of heated," Berg recalls of those studio sessions that eventually set him down his current path. "What ended up happening was they were like, 'You think you know it all? Then why don't you go fucking make a record?' And I was like, 'Alright, I guess I should!'" From there, Berg says he "caught the bug" of songwriting, which happened to coincide with Hartswick's move to Chicago. She met up with Berg, learned some of his songs, and Van Ghost was born soon after, opening for the Jennifer Hartswick Band at Metro Chicago.

With all the positive vibes surrounding the recording process for their new record, it's hard to believe that, just a few years earlier, Van Ghost experienced a studio session that nearly killed the band entirely. Coming off a successful debut, *Melodies for Lovers*, Berg and Hartswick landed a label deal and were teamed up for their next album, *The Domino Effect*, with accomplished Nashville producer and engineer Justin Niebank, who won a Grammy for his work on Taylor Swift's 2008 album *Fearless* and whose list of credits is a veritable who's who of Music City superstars. "The literal Nashville-mafia-type-stuff," jokes Berg.

"Justin has such an incredible pedigree of success with mainstream radio, they were so convinced that, if he produced this record and we let him lead the charge on the release plan, we would be a success," explains Berg. "In hindsight, what he tried to do was make a cool record for him. He made us his version of Van Ghost, and we all felt it abandoned our existing fan base."

"What was produced was an incredible pop record," Hartswick adds. "It just wasn't necessarily the intention of the artists to do that. The way the band came about was in such a grassroots and honest way, and Michael is the kind of songwriter where his songs don't follow a formula—that's what I really like about the way he writes music. I think the recording of that album got a little bit formulaic, and some of the rawness got shoved aside."

Natalie Cressman, who lends her voice and trombone to *The Ghost Unit* (and has played with Hartswick in TAB for years), was present for one day of tracking during the *Domino Effect* sessions—an experience that taught her an important lesson about newer bands coming up in the business.

"I think what ended up happening was that the product didn't really represent what the band was about," says Cressman. "Honestly, by the time it was ready to be put out, I think Berg didn't believe in it quite as much because it just got so far removed from the way that the band sounded live. I've been told that the ideal scenario is having a label backing and being able to hire a big-shot producer who takes your music to the next level. But I think the difference between these two records shows that you need to find the right fit and, sometimes, the right fit is doing it yourself with people you're comfortable around—feeling free to try out ideas and seeing what works best, while still staying true to the music."

In stark contrast to that experience, Van Ghost's six days at The Barn were everything Berg and Hartswick could have wanted, with each member of the collective providing their own input, thanks in part to the leadership of Berg, who admits that he's a bit out of his league in such tenured company.

"Ultimately—I hate to use this phrase, because I don't think of myself this way, but, as far as the rest of [them], it's an all-star band," he says, "because it's like, this guy from this [group] and this guy from this one." More specifically, the recording session was rounded out by co-songwriter Chris Gelbuda, The Nth Power guitarist Nick Cassarino, former North Mississippi Allstars bassist and Hartswick's husband Chris Chew, Big Gigantic saxophonist Dominic Lalli, Chicago-based guitarist Grant Tye, Matisyahu keyboardist Rob Marscher and drummer John Staten, who has worked with Karl Denson's Tiny Universe and Pimps of Joytime. Not a bad backing crew for a promoter-turned-bandleader.

"That's a real testament to the kind of personality that Michael has," Cressman says. "He brought together a group of people that was personally and musically compatible, but he was also considerate enough to empower us to be as involved as we wanted on every level. As a freelancer, it makes me feel comfortable when someone is giving you that freedom to come up with ideas and put your own stamp on it. There was a lot of tossing the 'talking stick' back and forth."

One song on *Ghost Unit* in particular encapsulates the collaborative and communicative atmosphere in which the album was created. "Follow Me," a tune that shows the funkier side of the Americana-leaning Van Ghost, was originally written by Berg but features lead vocals from Hartswick, bridge vocals from Cressman, horn charts written by both women and a saxophone solo from Lalli. It was mostly produced by Cassarino, who employed his Nth Power-honed style to make the song one of the highlights of the record.

"I opened Pandora's box with him, where we were egging him on and, all of a sudden, he was kind of in the driver's seat," says Berg. "With that song, the original vision of it was to be a funk song, and then you take someone who has that soulful funk background and let him lead the charge on it, and it ended up becoming even better than I thought."

While all the members of Van Ghost felt like family by the end of the process—to the point that they considered changing their name to The Ghost Unit to reflect it—Hartswick and Cressman were sisters long before this session. Both women found themselves working with Anastasio at very young ages—Hartswick at 17 and Cressman at 18 (when she auditioned via a sit-in with Hartswick's band)—and both find strength in working with each other.

"She's just, honestly, hands down, one of the best singers I've ever worked with," says Cressman. "One thing I've learned is being a good person and having a good vibe is just as important as being a badass at whatever you do, and I think she's an embodiment of both of those things."

For her part, Hartswick welcomed the opportunity to help out someone coming into the music business in a similar fashion as she had. "I did feel like I had been there before and could probably steer her out of the situations I had gotten myself into," she says. "A lot of times, you're gonna be looked at differently, or less than, or as somebody's girlfriend, you know? You're just not treated with the same respect as any 20-year-old guy would be coming into the band.

"But I would say the same thing to a young woman as I would to a young man, which is: Work. Work hard. Practice. Do all the stuff that you're supposed to do because opportunities will come. You're gonna get those gigs before other people because you can do that. You have to work. There is no shortcut."

While the players who created *The Ghost Unit* have busy schedules that don't easily allow for them to tour, they're not quite ready to forget the magic that took place in The Barn, and they plan to play together despite the hurdles. "It's almost impossible—I can't believe we got together for the record," says Hartswick. "But anything worth doing might be a little hard. It might have to be in 2019, but we'll get it together."

SOUTHERN STORYTELLERS

After welcoming a new baby, traversing the American landscape, and refining their stronger-than-ever collaborative process, husband-and-wife duo Shovels & Rope offer their most personal record to date. **BY AMY JACQUES**

It's a little after 9 p.m. on a Friday in late July, and Cary Ann Hearst and her husband Michael Trent are about to take the stage as part of a Newport Folk Festival late-night show, a benefit for the Boys & Girls Club, and presented by Frye. The couple, who create music together as Shovels & Rope, have dubbed the night "Busted Jukebox." Their set is stacked with numerous covers and special guests that feel in line with the weekend's collaborative feel.

Though Shovels & Rope keep their newest material in their back pocket on this night, they've also started the rollout for their latest full-length, *Little Seeds*, which arrives next month. A change of pace from their traditional character sketches, this album is deeply personal and emotional. Its songs touch on a number of recent events in their lives—from learning of Hearst's pregnancy to caring for Trent's ailing father, losing loved ones, traveling the country and working together in a family band.

The husband-and-wife duo fill Rhode Island's Jane Pickens Theater & Event Center with their Americana folk-rock as they offer takes on other people's songs, like "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain," "El Paso" and "The Wayfaring Stranger"—with a little help from their friends John Moreland, Hayes Carll, Matt Vasquez, Jonny Fritz, Margo Price and Lucius. (They would later return the favor, playing with Vasquez's band Middle Brother during their set on the festival grounds at Fort Adams State Park. "We're sitting in with them [on Sunday], so we're actually cramming their lyrics," says Trent.)

Shovels & Rope also cover a song from Trent's former band The Films ("Fingernails for Breakfast"), play "Leaving Louisiana in the Broad Daylight" as "just us" and bring the whole ensemble out for the sing-along "Peace, Love and Understanding."

Hearst, wearing a black dress with a white floral pattern, sets up shop behind her trademark "junkyard drum kit" and Trent, donning a black suit, moves from guitar to harmonica to piano throughout the evening.

The classic theater personifies the Newport Folk Festival's distinctly Americana vibe, with its wooden stage, exposed brick backdrop and two eagle statues flanking the top of the stage, framed by a weathered yellow curtain. (The festival's logo features an eagle carrying a guitar in its talons, surrounded by stars and nautical rope.) The lone decoration perched on Trent's wood-encased upright piano: a lime green lamp with an exposed bulb, sans shade.

Their stage, like the drum kit and the evening itself, seems refreshingly cobbled together in the moment. In fact, the band has spent the entire day rehearsing the material and playing these songs for the first time together with the guest musicians. It adds to the authenticity and rustic feel of the event, and the camaraderie and humble nature of the artists are palpable—you can tell it's just a jam session among friends.

Last year's *Busted Jukebox* album was the impetus for the evening's show, which Hearst refers to as a "recreation album" and Trent calls a "recording experiment."

"We were just playing with arrangements and it was the kind of album where we got to be as creative as we wanted to and reinterpret songs, just go off the deep end as much as we wanted to, and nobody knew it was coming. There were no expectations," he says.

"I always think it's good for your writing fashion to spend time with the tunes that you love and that wasn't our intention, but I'm sure it made us a little bit better as musicians," Hearst adds of channeling other material.

The show ends with a mix of musicians and Newport Folk staff members huddling onstage together. Adding to that family vibe, the back row of the theater includes a few Southern friends who traveled to Rhode Island to enjoy the unique and intimate show.

"We're kind of still blown out from the other night," Trent says after the Busted Jukebox show, laughing, and adding that they have been drinking lots of coffee as of late. "It was a lot of preparation to do on the road—but it was fun."

They echo this creative spirit, sense of collaboration and hard-working ethos in their 2012 hit song "Birmingham," as the lyrics "It ain't what you got, it's what you make" seem to be somewhat of a through line for Shovels & Rope.

HEARST AND TRENT met in the early '00s when their bands opened for Jump Little Children at Athens' Georgia Theatre and "were friends for years before starting to play together and then played together for several years before starting to tour together." Both of their fathers were mandolin players with bluegrass backgrounds, "so we both grew up jamming with our dads," Hearst says. "Mike started out in rock-and-roll bands [notably, The Films] and I was a young Tennessee porch-picker."

The Films relocated to Charleston, S.C., because it was easier to tour out of the Southeast than Colorado. Hearst had attended College of Charleston and never left the Holy City, sticking around to play in bands and bars. The couple released their first record together, *Shovels & Rope*, under their individual names in 2008.

She says that the South continues to inform their story, language and turn of phrase.

"It's complicated living in the South because the baggage is so heavy, but the future is bright," Hearst says as she describes the Lowcountry's beautiful and colorful landscape. "[Touring] lends itself to waxing poetic about home, which, in our case, means live oaks, Spanish moss, salty air, fecund and smelly marshland, briney oysters, friends who farm, clucking hens, land-wealthy rednecks, degenerate sons of blue-blood Charleston families, bonfires, fine restaurants, the threat of hurricanes and rising seas. Musically, it's not the geography as much as the topography of the American musical landscape that informs what we try to do. We find the stuff we like the feel of from wherever it comes from."

In addition to Southern culture and the waterways of Charleston, their lyrics namecheck Saugerties, N.Y., and Harvard Square, Mississippi and Bakersfield, Calif., the Chesapeake and New York's BQE. Shovels & Rope's music feels truly Americana—the open road and U.S. landscape seep into their music.

"We see a lot of the country because we're on the road all the time, so it can't help but just sneak in there—we definitely appreciate it and we're lucky enough to see a lot of America," Trent says. "It's inspiring and we get to meet all these different kind of people that will round you out, in a good way."

The Band is another touchstone for Hearst and Trent, specifically Garth Hudson, whom they pay tribute to on *Little Seeds* with "The Last Hawk."

"It goes without saying that there's no more definitive folk, Americana band than the Canadians from The Band," Hearst says with a laugh. "And we've been huge fans of Levon and his personality. That song is a tribute to Garth Hudson—we had read a *Rolling Stone* article where Garth looked back on the experience of *The Basement Tapes* and working with Bob Dylan during those early years. We were marveling about what amounted to the practice session of these cherished, magical recordings. Nobody can recreate that and Garth had set up recording equipment, not considering that anyone would hear it. We were remembering how much we loved that music."

* * *

SINCE OUR INITIAL meeting at the *Relix* office in 2012, while Shovels & Rope were promoting *O' Be Joyful*, the band has garnered numerous accolades and accomplished so much. They won the Emerging Artist of the Year and Song of the Year awards at the Americana Honors & Awards in 2013, were the subject of an award-winning documentary film by The Moving Picture Boys called *The Ballad of Shovels and Rope*, performed at NYC's Lincoln Center as part of the "Great American Songbook" series, and have made TV appearances and performed at nearly every major U.S. festival.

Now, they offer *Little Seeds*, their most personal and powerful album to date. Though this 13-track collection still has a few of their signature Southern Gothic-inspired tales (namely a song titled "Botched Execution" and a Civil War battle story, "Missionary Ridge"), it's mostly a raw, candid and creative take on their own ups and downs of the past few years.

"We were just trying to write honest material, and we have done a lot of character-based songwriting in the past—that's just sort of something we like to do—but there was a lot going on in our lives while writing this album and it just ended up being more personal than I feel like we usually are," says Trent.

While working on the record, Hearst learned that she was pregnant, and Trent's parents were also living with the couple at the time. "Mourning Song" and "Invisible Man" were both inspired by caring for Trent's dad, who has Alzheimer's. They beautifully capture what it's like for someone living with this debilitating disease, and provide a thoughtful perspective from a loved one struggling with it, particularly through the lines: "I put on my headphones and I remember that sound..." and "I hate to repeat it, but it's not my choice."

"Most people know somebody who is dealing with it. As people age, it seems it's more prevalent and, with everything going on around us, it was hard not to reflect on that topic. So that definitely played onto our record on more than one occasion," Hearst says. "It's an epidemic and it's heartbreaking, but it's also something that gets talked about within the family, but it's not a national conversation. So if we have contributed something positive to the national conversation, that would be good."

They also reference the universal and emotional topics of violence, racial divides and unity on "BWYR," a powerful spoken-word track that they wrote after learning of the mass shooting at Charleston's "Mother Emanuel" AME Church in June 2015.

"It was an emotional purging exercise. We were on the road—a lot of our friends were grieving and we couldn't be with them. It was written more as a poem, not really with an intention of sharing at the beginning. It was born onto paper at that moment and we had made a quick recording of it on the phone," Trent says. "With such a personal thing, it was hard to imagine putting it out there. Then, at one point, our manager and friend, Paul Bannister, was listening to

the roughs and he stumbled on it, was moved by it and encouraged us to put it on the record."

Hearst notes that they decided to use the song on *Little Seeds* in an effort to help bring attention to the senseless violence sweeping the country. "It's escalating in a terrifying, heartbreaking way and we're all saddened by that. There are such small ways to stand up and say something. Good people can't sit around and not say anything and hope that it all works out. Michael and I are just humble bums but we can try to voice the feelings that we feel, and that the people we know and love feel, and address the national pain. I learned the word 'didactic' recently, and so we don't want to do it in a preachy, self-righteous way, but in a genuine way. We're like everyone else, and we're also new parents, so there's a whole lot more at stake. That's why we're actively putting it on the record and that's our statement about it."

They also honor their close friend and fellow musician Eric Brantley, who was fatally shot last year, with *Little Seeds*' final two tracks: an audio recording of his mother describing his birth in the back of a police car ("Eric's Birthday") as well as a moving tribute to his life ("This Ride").

"It was just the most horrible thing. We had a memorial a couple days after—a private, small gathering—and people shared stories and laughed and cried and just grieved together in a physical way," Trent says. "His mom shared that story and it was such a beautiful moment and endearing, and people were smiling about him and that story because, if you knew him, of course he was born in a police car, you know?"

"Not that he was ever a criminal," laughs Hearst. "He was just an awesome dude who worked out of our garage on motorcycles and I'm happy we can share those memories of his character."

Trent recorded Eric's mother telling the story on his phone and was initially skeptical to share it with others because it was so personal. "It was very kind of her and so cool that she would do that," he adds. "It really meant something to us and to our friends, and there's universal sentiment in there as well. We wanted to do right by him and put something out in the world that is dedicated in his memory."

"We just look for something interesting to say, or at least an interesting perspective on a common experience," says Hearst, pictured here at the "Busted Jukebox" show in Newport, R.I.

* * *

TRENT AND HEARST make their home on Johns Island, S.C., a quiet, coastal community just over the Ashley and Stono Rivers on the outskirts of Charleston. Last September, they welcomed a daughter, Louisiana Jean, who joins their dog, Townes Van Zandt, to round out the family.

"We'd rally and collaborate and we were writing like one person. We were trying to write a story and shape the song and, then, the narrative became about us trying to write the song, and the struggle and cooperation that was taking place."
CARY ANN HEARST

Parenthood has had a positive impact on Shovels & Rope's writing and recording process; it's helped them understand the value of teamwork and the true meaning of their partnership.

"There's a lot of scheduling going on. We make all of our records at home—our studio is in our house, so we just really have to team up. We've always been a tight team and we balance each other out pretty well, but we really had to get real with it—we needed each other a lot during this time," Trent says. "Whether it be emotionally or just, 'You need to do this physical task right now because there's no way I can do this.' Or, 'You need to finish this song because there's no way I can finish it.' It was very real."

"It was a new level of collaboration," Hearst adds with her trademark chuckle. (After their daughter's birth, they joked in a Facebook post: "Like most of our endeavors, she was made at home out of a few things we had lying around." And they posted a new lullaby on SoundCloud, "Hush Little Rocker," to celebrate the occasion.)

Along the way, Hearst and Trent have become closer as a couple, and more intimate writing partners. They reference being in both a personal and professional relationship on "Buffalo Nickel," and finding that balance of working with someone who is also your spouse.

"I think that we have found [that balance]," Hearst says with a laugh, mentioning that she's a little bit sunburned, as she and Trent look out at the tall ships and sailboats on the Narragansett Bay beyond Fort Adams State Park.

While discussing dividing the workload, she also notes that the songwriting intensified with this record, and that she doesn't know how two people could be closer than her and Trent. While a lot of this was part of their normal process of working together on a list of ideas, with some of *Little Seeds*, she says, the ideas were born mutually.

"We'd rally and collaborate and we were writing like one person. We were trying to write a story and shape the song and, then, the narrative became about us trying to write the song, and the struggle and cooperation that was taking place," Hearst says. "We were laughing at ourselves when it was done. It was like, holding a mirror up to us, so yeah, our songwriting process has changed in a good way."

SAFETY IN (ATOMIC)

NUMBERS

Neko Case, k.d. lang and Laura Veirs offer a modern, female spin on the Traveling Wilburys.

BY JUSTIN JACOBS

CASE/LANG/VEIRS chose a familiar setting for their first show: the Oregon Public Broadcasting studio session stage in Portland, the city where both k.d. lang and Laura Veirs have planted roots. But the warm, hometown crowd didn't quite shake the nervous energy in the air—this performance arrived three years after lang, Veirs and fellow singer-songwriter Neko Case first discussed the remote possibility of creating music together. After years of emails, after countless writing sessions in kitchens and living rooms, after arguments about lyrics and struggles over melodies, and after a culminating five-day studio session that birthed their first and only album, the trio were finally taking the stage.

Less than five minutes later, they'd finished the show's first song: "Atomic Number," a richly harmonized folk piece carried by Veirs' simple, lovely acoustic guitar. lang smiled at the crowd and just said, "Thank you." Veirs quietly traded her guitar for another waiting offstage. And Case stood grinning, almost mischievously. Her arms gestured toward the band, then snapped back to her hips. Her grin crested into a smile and she said, "Well, that's a relief."

With that, they danced through the other songs on their eponymous album, *case/lang/veirs*, which dropped a few days earlier on June 17 through indie heavyweight label ANTI-. The record presents 14 songs and three distinct voices—the low, lush whisper of lang, the bright

chime of Veirs and Case's gusty whirl—fused into one patchwork sound that stitched folk rock, chamber music and pop colorfully and vividly together. The set was produced by Veirs' husband Tucker Martine, whose credits include Modest Mouse, My Morning Jacket and The Decemberists.

Like an Alan Lomax folk archive, *case/lang/veirs* comes ripe with its own lore—the story of how three major female singer-songwritings from three different musical generations dropped their own careers to create something beautiful together. But unlike those Lomax recordings, this project started with an email. It was just one line that lang dashed off on a night at home when a fledgling idea suddenly started to make sense.

"The idea of a new collaboration project was in my mind for a long time, but I didn't have the people in mind," she says.

lang met Veirs around 2012, when she moved from Los Angeles to Portland. Both lang and Case had worked on Veirs' 2013 album, *Warp and Weft*. But beyond those brief connections, each musician was acutely aware of the others' distinct styles and places in the folk universe.

"It was just on a whim," remembers lang. "It was seriously just one line: 'Do you guys want to make a record together?' I copied them both and sent it. And they wrote me back within half an hour: 'Absolutely.'"

Case recalls that night similarly. "There was no doubt," she says. "Of course I wanted to do that. So I wrote her right back." Though Case and lang were the least acquainted of the three, she felt a buzz from the beginning.

"Sometimes you meet someone and think, 'I could be your friend all the time.' That was her to me. I knew she was funny and warm; she has a gravitational pull," says Case. "And I wasn't worried that the music was gonna suck. I knew Laura and k.d. both made amazing music. There were a lot of risks to be taken, but I never thought they'd have bad taste or make bad decisions."

In less than an hour, a brand new band had emerged. But bringing that email to reality wasn't quite as simple.

* * *

IN A KURT LODER-hosted MTV segment in 1988, Roy Orbison glowed when he said, "We didn't question each other. We just went right ahead... and we're all fans of each other." He was talking about the Traveling Wilburys, the quintessential supergroup featuring Orbison, George Harrison, Bob Dylan, Jeff Lynne and Tom Petty.

"That was a lot of fun, writing the songs, because you didn't always know who was gonna sing the songs," said Petty. "I get Roy's autograph everyday."

lang had recorded "Crying" with Orbison in 1987, and the idea behind the Wilburys stuck with her for years. She was fascinated with the thought that a group of individually successful musicians could shed their egos and approach collaboration in a new way, laying it all out on the table—

> "The idea of a new collaboration project was in my mind for a long time, but I didn't have the people in mind." K.D. LANG

no strings attached. If a handful of the biggest legends of rock-and-roll could do it, then surely she could, too.

But the idea sat dormant for nearly two decades. lang has recorded plenty of collaborations, including her 2002 covers album with Tony Bennett. The red-hot spark of co-creation, though, never lit. Something about Case and Veirs' voices, and the women themselves, clicked with lang that night—by the following week, she was meeting Veirs and Martine for lunch to lay out some plans.

"They roped me in pretty early," says Martine. "It was 1,000 percent still this abstract musical idea. We didn't know what it'd look or sound like, and k.d. began kicking around the idea to cover a full album, song for song. But Neko, Laura and I honestly thought it'd be a shame not to try to make an album of original music. We knew that'd be so much more work, and probably a more painful process: Putting three unique, strong-willed artists in a room together to co-write songs was not going to be easy."

Even with that early momentum, the project unfolded slowly. lang met Veirs once a week, "to see if we could even write together," says lang. "She'd never collaborated in the writing process before." Indeed, Colorado-born Veirs had long been a staunchly solo artist. Her 1999 debut was a sparse affair of hand-plucked folk, and the eight albums that followed were very much her singular creations. Aside from Veirs' 2011 collection of children's songs, *Tumble Bee*, which featured guests like Jim James and Colin Meloy, each project was a spotlight on her lyrical, relatable songwriting. But, for k.d. lang, Veirs was willing to try. And, for the initial year and a half after lang sent that email, that's exactly what they did.

So where was their third band member? Touring, mostly, much like she had been doing for the previous 20 years of her life. Since rising through the Vancouver DIY punk scene with her band Maow, Neko Case has never truly stopped. Each album and each tour has helped cement her sound—round, dynamic melodies and winking lyrics, equal parts indie rock and country—and find new fans.

Case launched her sixth studio album into the world in 2013. *The Worse Things Get, the Harder I Fight, the Harder I Fight, the More I Love You* was a Grammy-nominated hit, and Case's schedule bloated. In 2014, The New Pornographers, Case's indie-pop band with A.C. Newman, Dan Bejar and others, released *Brill Bruisers* and promptly hit the road. And by then, she was already preparing *Truckdriver, Gladiator, Mule,* an eight-album box set that hit stores in 2015.

"I was in the loop a little bit, but I didn't have a whole lot of time to immerse myself," says Case. In bits and bursts, the three songwriters hashed out some time together. ("We had to book Neko a year in advance," laughs lang.) From the beginning, the music was unbounded and undefined. Anything was possible.

"We wanted to make a punk-rock, girl-group album. That was our starting idea; the Ramones were definitely fast and used three chords, but they didn't shy away from melody," Case says. "But the songs just didn't sound like that. We knew we should write these songs as ourselves; that'd be the most challenging thing, anyway."

Songwriting, like any art, requires different tools from different people. Some work in fits of inspiration, some plot out each section of melody and every phrase. Case, lang and Veirs land all over the spectrum, and it took time to fuse their disparate styles into a working method.

"Laura was generally who came in with the ideas, the germs; Neko has a very spontaneous vision—she can spurt out a bridge right on the spot. And I'm more methodical, arranging and thinking about chords and structure and editing," says lang. "We would gather with the intention to write, but having three people, at least one is usually focused and two might be uninspired. Sometimes, we'd leave and walk down the street to grab a coffee, but we'd be talking about music and lyrics the whole time. Something inevitably would arise from even the times we weren't focused."

For Case, forcing inspiration was a non-starter—she needed a structure to fill with creativity. "We'd say, 'We'll sit here for two hours,' not, 'We'll sit here until the song is done.' You need to know that there is an escape. That takes the pressure off," she says. "You've got to

Dino Perrucci

case/lang/veirs summoned the spirit of fellow supergroup CSNY at the annual Newport Folk Festival this past July.

> "We wanted to make a punk-rock, girl-group album. That was our starting idea; the Ramones were definitely fast and used three chords, but they didn't shy away from melody."
>
> **NEKO CASE**

have a good relationship with your work; it can't be like turning in your thesis for grad school. If every song was a thesis, I'd be a pretty unhappy person."

When the gates would open and words and ideas poured out, often after a walk to a local juice shop, a new challenge presented itself: As solo musicians, these women are their own editors. Writing together, they had to evaluate each other's lyrics—and speak up when they just weren't good enough.

lang calls "Atomic Number" one of their sessions' aha moments, where the trio tapped into a current and swam. "We wanted to call ourselves Atomic Number, but, like all band names are today, it was taken," she says. (Though it looks like the late-'90s Detroit band is no longer active.)

But it didn't always go so smoothly. Both Case and lang describe the tougher songwriting moments in the most personal of terms. "You're standing around naked and baring your soul," says lang. "We had to fight and drop our egos and voice our concerns and hear things we didn't want to hear, but that fueled us to go on."

Case takes the image a bit further: "We definitely had to pull our pants down and say, 'I'm gonna go to the bathroom right here in front of you.' We'd feel married to a part, or tell someone their lyrics sounded cliché. That can hurt feelings, but we sucked it up. There were moments when we were butthurt, but it wasn't beyond that," she laughs. "Laura and k.d. like to pretend we were in some girls' reform school, fighting each other with knives. It wasn't that bad."

However much Case, Veirs and lang struggled, they emerged from the sessions with 14 songs written—and now it was time to sing them.

* * *

OUTSIDE OF THE three singer-songwriters, no one was closer to *case/lang/veirs* than Tucker Martine. And, even after having worked on albums for R.E.M., Spoon and Death Cab for Cutie, he'd never approached a project like this. When the time finally came to enter his studio in Portland, Martine had helped assemble a crack squad of musicians, including multi-instrumentalist Rob Burger, who's worked with Iron & Wine, John Zorn and Wilco drummer Glenn Kotche. They had exactly five days with everyone available, and a list of songs that no one wanted to sacrifice.

"After going back and forth, we agreed that we needed all the songs," says Martine. "We had three great singers to represent; if it was too heavy on one of them, the record became a weird, lopsided Neko Case album with too many guests. That was my big trick, to make it feel like a group. I wanted you to hear that these three singers did the work, got their hands dirty and truly made an album together."

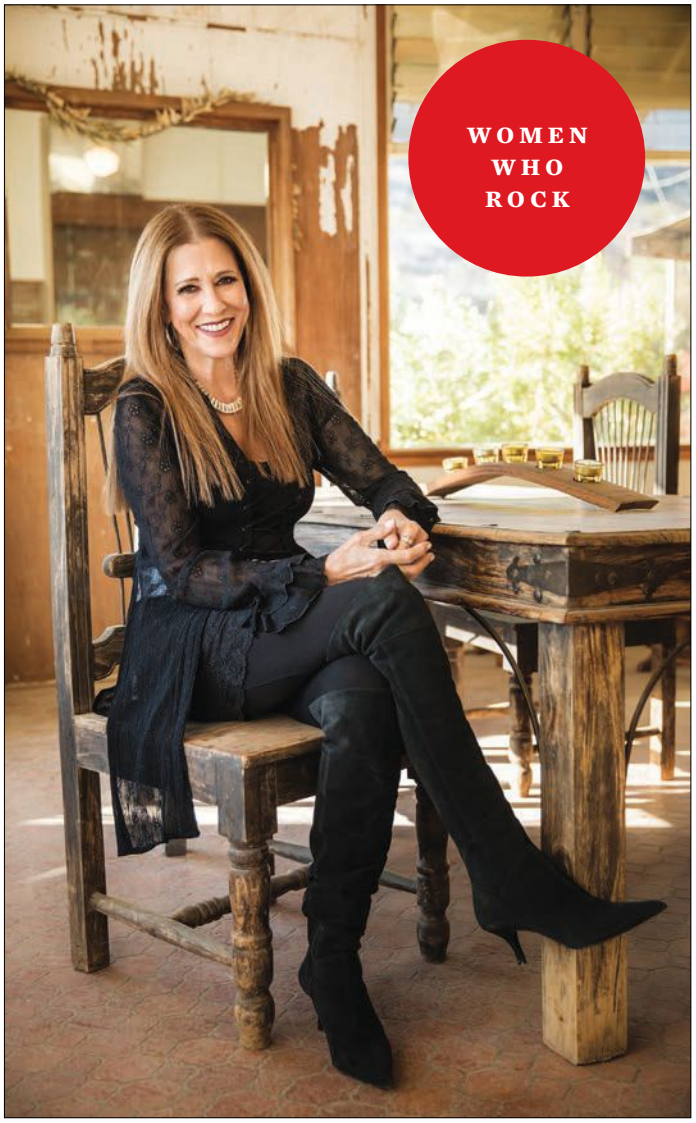
Martine recalls songs changing shape and "underdogs rising to the top of the heap." The five days flew, harmonies blossoming organically as the band easily slipped into the feel—mystical, earthy, swirling—of the trio's compositions. As the last day drew to a close, Martine dimmed the lights in his studio to play the whole album. They cracked beers; the mood was jovial. They weren't sure exactly what they had, but they had something.

"But, just then, k.d. called to me. She wanted to try 'Honey and Smoke' one more time, with more balls, a little more rocking and carefree," says Martine. "We had nothing to lose. And that take was head and shoulders above the rest—it had a new life force."

On *case/lang/veirs*, "Honey and Smoke" sounds like it's bathing in the latter. lang's voice is quietly powerful, twirling into the air like a smoke ring, embracing a torch-song melody. Her collaborators sing backup, cushioning her vocals with softly glowing harmonies. The next track, "Song for Judee," is an ode to iconic folk singer Judee Sill, with Veirs' clear-eyed descriptions ("Living in a '55 Cadillac, five people sleeping in shifts") and a crystalline melody as light and beautiful as wind chimes. The Case-led songs drive harder, with cutting guitars and blustery choruses.

When the album was released, critics and fans were quick to embrace it. "I think people have been pleasantly surprised that these three flavors, strangely, go very well together," says Martine. But, as case/lang/veirs hit the road over the summer, their shows revealed a deeper appeal—a palpable, mutual artistic respect forged through a shared experience and a shared creation. Every night, the songs belonged to all of them. Like proud parents, they invited the crowd to watch them grow and change.

"This was a master class. It was a little painful, but we came out the other side as soldiers," says Case. "And now we're playing together because we fucking dig each other."



DELTA SPIRIT

Rita Coolidge revisits Delaney & Bonnie, Mad Dogs & Englishmen, the origins of "Layla" and those 20 feet to stardom in her new autobiography.

BY DEAN BUDNICK

IN HER NEW MEMOIR, *Delta Lady*, Rita Coolidge looks back on a rich, nuanced career. Coolidge began singing in the late '60s, recording radio station call letters in a Memphis "jingle factory" before she relocated to Los Angeles. There, she became a background vocalist in the studio and on the road with Delaney & Bonnie and the Mad Dogs & Englishmen tour before she embarked on a solo artist path, while also collaborating with her then-husband Kris Kristofferson for a stretch in the mid-to-late '70s. The book's title comes from the song written in her honor by Leon Russell, who figures in the narrative, along with Coolidge's friends, lovers and colleagues, including Joe Cocker, Stephen Stills, Graham Nash, George Harrison and Willie Nelson. Coolidge's warm and winning personality shines throughout *Delta Lady*, although she is frank and forthright when discussing some of her personal and professional frustrations, such as the songwriting credits she never received for "Superstar" and "Layla."

Your first tour was with Delaney & Bonnie and, in *Delta Lady*, you emphasize that they never quite received their due.

I think that Delaney & Bonnie probably influenced more musicians from that time than anyone else. It wasn't just the people around us and it wasn't just Southerners who had migrated to California together. When Delaney & Bonnie opened for Blind Faith, Eric Clapton saw the band play and how honest and how true those roots were. He wanted to play that music and, ultimately, he did.

Elton John and I were dancing at a party after a film premiere and he said, "I just have to tell you that I wouldn't be where I am right now if it weren't for Delaney & Bonnie and all you guys playing honest music." As we found out a few years ago, he was obviously enamored with Leon's music and had so much respect for Leon as a player, which we all do. [*Ed. Note*: John invited Russell to collaborate on the 2010 album *The Union*.]

The closest thing to Delaney & Bonnie is Susan Tedeschi and Derek Trucks. They're really good. I love them, but there will never be another band like Delaney & Bonnie. They were the first white band to hit the whole world with black roots music, and it was coming from a true place because Delaney grew up in Mississippi and Bonnie was from St. Louis, and they had both been making that music all their lives. When they came together, it was like the comets exploded, and when they broke up, it just broke my heart. I know that Bonnie loved Delaney more than life itself. I just think it had to do with the influx of cocaine and people being told that it wasn't addictive and mixing it with alcohol. They would say: "Put the edge on; take the edge off." Delaney pretty much spent all his time doing that and the edge seemed to take over his body and he just became mean. He was mean to Bonnie; he was mean to other people when it would just get away from him.

The other thing is that we came back from doing a big tour in England and Joe [Cocker] reached out and said, "I've got to have a band on the road in five days." We had just come off a tour and weren't working—nobody was on retainer—so we jumped right in to help Joe, never once thinking that we had, in a sense, put an end to Delaney & Bonnie because it was never the same after that with them. They were so hurt that they never tried to pull us all back together again.

Did either of them articulate that at the time?

No, they did not. I don't think

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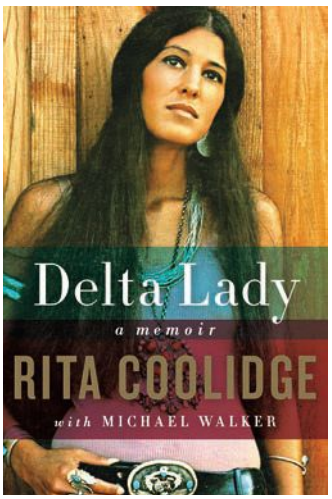
that they even realized it at all. I think that they felt abandoned and they were hurt. But their talent was obviously the core of the band and they planned on putting together another fabulous group of people and continuing, but it just never happened.

As you emphasize in the book, the Mad Dogs & Englishmen tour also took its toll on Joe Cocker, who suffered from emotional exhaustion and financial ruin.

I think they went hand in hand. Joe worked his butt off and was the driving force. He was the star—he was the one everyone came to see. Everything was around Joe. Leon agreed to be the musical director, the ringmaster, but he said, "I'll only do it if I have all the control—the songs, the arrangements—everything is my decision." Then A&M came in, brought in the film crew and Joe watched all of this going on around him while having absolutely no control. So, from the get-go, most of the time, Joe felt powerless until he hit the stage—and then there was no doubt who we were there for.

After the tour was over, he went to [A&M Records co-founder] Jerry Moss because he wanted to buy a guitar, and there was no money. He probably came off that tour in debt and he didn't have a place to live—he was sleeping on [producer] Denny Cordell's floor, pretty much in the foyer of the house. Nobody was looking out for Joe. I would call and say, "Denny, where's Joe? How's he doing?" because I think there's a nurturing side to every woman but, being a Cherokee woman, I think mine's a little stronger than others. I recognize when someone's in trouble, and Joe's certainly someone that I cared about so much.

So it was important to me to help him come out of that pit, and I would do it by bringing him over to the house. We would watch TV and I would cook black-eyed peas and cornbread and whatever he wanted, and just get him



rested. After a few days, the light would come back in his eyes and he would say, "OK, I'm ready to go back; I'm ready to face this again." But it wouldn't last very long. Gradually, he did come out of it and then—for the first time since I had met him some years before—I saw him kind of pissed, realizing that he should've got more out of that.

You mentioned Susan Tedeschi and Derek Trucks. Can you share your perspective on the Mad Dogs & Englishmen reunion event with Tedeschi Trucks Band that look place at last year's Lockn'?

Susan told me that when she and Derek decided to join bands—because they were both amazing guitarists and musicians in their own right—they sat down and watched *Mad Dogs & Englishmen* and saw the whole spectrum of what was going on and decided, "That's what we're going to do." So they really put their band together and stylized their arrangements after Mad Dogs & Englishmen and, apparently, they also perform some of the arrangements from the Mad Dogs & Englishmen tour. I think that's why Lockn' was almost like stepping back in time. They have such an amazing band and their singers—oh, my God—and the players are just incredible.

For me, it was one of the highlights of my life to be a part of the Lockn' Festival and to be able to hang out with Susan and their band and also with the Mad Dogs & Englishmen alums who are still active and play.

Those of us who were able to get back really share something that is unique in the history of music. We knew it then and we really appreciate it now.

Had you remained in touch with those musicians over the years?

Not really. I've stayed in touch with Pamela [Polland] and, every now and then, I'd run into the brothers [Daniel and Matthew Moore], but not really.

Claudia Lennear, one of Mad Dogs' alums who made it to Lockn', was featured in the film *20 Feet from Stardom*. You're someone who worked as a background vocalist and then became a lead singer in her own right. Can you talk about that transition to the front of the stage?

When I went to California, I had recorded a single for Pepper Records in Memphis—it was a new label from Pepper Tanner, which was a company that did radio spots for about 75 percent of the Southeastern part of the U.S. While I was in Memphis, I made my living not only doing some background sessions, but also working with Pepper Tanner. They started a label called Pepper Records and I had the first single.

Leon and I left Memphis and drove to California. It took us several days and, by the time I got to California, that record had shot up the charts. Within a couple of weeks, it was No. 1 in Los Angeles, a regional hit. It was called "Turn Around and Love You," written by Donna Weiss. When I arrived in Los Angeles, I already knew Delaney & Bonnie, and then, I met the rest of the band, so it felt like I had a family in California. At the same time, people were walking up to me and asking for autographs and I was doing every TV show in LA, so I didn't have to beat down a lot of doors to get my name out there. That's just something that the universe or the good Lord did.

Because I was singing with Delaney & Bonnie, people started calling me to do sessions. I was coming from Pepper Tanner, where I had been doing the most boring radio spots to pay the bills—singing the call letters for radio stations, the same packages but with different call letters, which we would do all day long. It wasn't challenging. We were like any musician just doing what was written.

When I got to California and was able to start doing background sessions and meeting all the wonderful background session singers, I thought it was the best job in the world. This was the era in which we would just stand there and overdub tracks and stack tracks and change parts. Every group would be specific to the artist but, many times, I was able to sit back and arrange background parts if the artist or producer didn't have that done already. Sometimes I would go to work at 8 a.m., and go from session to session and not get home until after midnight. The whole day would just be so full of energy and wonderful music. I really loved it and I continued to do it after I began my solo career.

Delaney & Bonnie were not only the first real band I worked with, but also, without a doubt, the best band I worked with as a sideman. As far as moving from a background singer to the center of the stage, Bonnie made everyone feel like they were an equally integral part of the band. So when I did move to center of the stage on Mad Dogs & Englishmen, it wasn't intimidating at all because, half the time when I was with Delaney & Bonnie, she was back there singing with me or would drag me up to the center of the stage to sing with her. [*Ed. Note:* Coolidge typically brought the house down while singing lead on "Superstar," in addition to her role on background vocals.] She's just such an amazing woman and

she's still probably just about my favorite woman on the planet. I love her.

Pepper Tanner originally wanted to release that single under the name Antoinette Lovely, yet you refused. It seems that there was such a power differential, with the leverage in their favor; however, you held your ground.

They wanted to change my name but I come from a family of strong women. I have Cherokee heritage and Cherokee societies were matrilineal—we had women chiefs. When a woman married, she didn't go live with the guy's people, the guy came and lived with her because the women had a great deal of power in Cherokee Nation. I grew up with the belief on a cellular level that nobody was going to tell me what to do when I knew it was the wrong thing.

In terms of career frustrations, you were denied songwriting credits on both "Layla" and "Superstar."

I'll preface this by saying I haven't heard a word from Eric Clapton or his camp—I'm sure that he's aware, but that's kind of the way it's been all along. Jim Gordon and I became a couple and dated for probably a year—he was the drummer with Delaney & Bonnie for a while and, during that time, the Mad Dogs & Englishmen tour took place. Before then, we had written a song called "Time (Don't Let the World Get in Our Way)." Jim had come over to my house one day and sat down—he was just noodling around at the piano and played a couple chords. He was not a great piano player, barely even competent, but he started noodling around and I sat down and started playing some chords and then started writing lyrics. We finished the song and decided that we should make a demo since we were on the way to England to record with Eric. The day we were in the studio with Eric, I sat down at the piano and played it and sang. Eric seemed to like it, so I gave him a cassette and left it on the piano. Everybody in Delaney & Bonnie were there—Bobby Whitlock, Carl Radle. The whole band who was there witnessed it.

A year later, I was in the studio having pictures made for my new album on A&M and I hear this music come over the PA system in the studio and it sounded so very familiar. As it went on, it suddenly dawned on me—that's my music, that's why it's so familiar. It had become the coda for "Layla."

I heard Eric's guitar and knew what had happened, but I still had enough faith in people to think maybe I had a writer's credit. So I ran over to Tower Records and got the record and, tragically, I did not—it said Jim Gordon and Eric Clapton. They had totally just left me out of it.

Beyond the credits you were due, those publishing rights are quite lucrative. How aggressively did you pursue them?

With "Layla," I went to [producer] David Anderle because David knew the song "Time"—Priscilla and Booker had recorded it on one of their albums. [*Ed. Note*: It appears on Booker T. and Priscilla Jones' *Chronicles* record. Rita's sister Priscilla was married to Jones at the time, and the "Layla" connection is irrefutable.] I went to David and told him what had happened and he said, "You're not going to get to Eric—nobody gets to Eric. You have to go through Robert Stigwood, his management company, and the guy is just not somebody you want in your life—he's not a nice man." I knew Robert Stigwood, I'd been to his house, so I called and explained my case and he just said, "What are you gonna do? You're a girl. You don't have money to fight this." And he was right.

So I went back to David and he said, "You can't afford to go up against them in this lawsuit." Jerry Moss said, "You gotta let it go, you don't have the money to fight the deep pockets of Eric Clapton and Robert Stigwood." I've told this story my whole life and, when the book was released, I saw where people had written stuff, which I stopped reading, saying, "Why are you just telling this story now?" Well, it's not just now. I've been telling this story since 1970. I didn't sit back on my thumbs—I knew what had happened.

And with "Superstar," when that record came out, and I saw Bonnie Bramlett and Leon Russell, Bonnie even said, "Why didn't you say something, Rita?" And I said, "Because, I knew if I did, then Delaney would beat the shit out of you and it wasn't worth it."

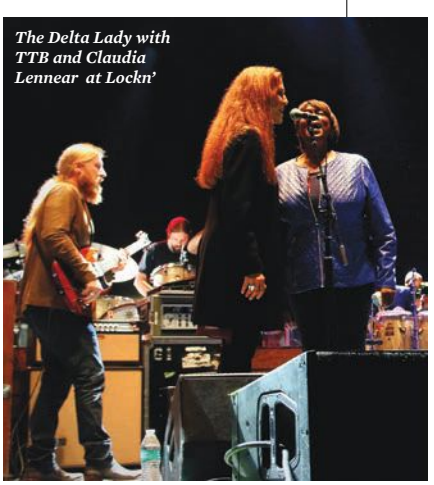
In the book, you suggest that sexism didn't stop you from getting where you needed to go, although you certainly acknowledge its presence. Do you think it's harder or easier for women in the industry today?

I think that women across the board in every job in this country are underpaid. They don't get the same amount of money as men. Thank God for Taylor Swift, who is another strong young woman who takes no prisoners. She knows the difference between right and wrong, and the injustices against women and the inequality. But as far as that goes, I think I was always paid to sing through the unions—when I was doing background work—so there was no gender bias there.

So, as far as my profession, I can't say that guys get paid more than women because that's just probably not true. But I still think that within the hierarchy, men want to tell women artists what to do and how to record their music and how their songs should be written. To write a song and have someone say, "The song's not finished, you need to write a bridge"—they would never say that to a guy. They would never do that with a guy because a guy would punch them out. It's more of a power play and women are becoming stronger and having a bigger place in our society, and I think that a lot of men feel threatened.

Early in your book, you write, "I think there is something to be said for the years of living the music that you've been singing." Can you talk about what that means to you?

When I was in my twenties with Delaney & Bonnie and the Mad Dogs & Englishmen tour, I don't think I realized the depth that music has in people's lives. I didn't recognize that my voice had somehow reached into people's hearts and communicated something to them, comforted them or just made them feel happy or remember something wonderful. Music does all of those things. I never dreamt that I would still be doing this stuff with a new record deal and touring for four months at 71 years old. It's more fun than it's ever been. It continues to be the best thing in my life.



The Delta Lady with TTB and Claudia Lennear at Lockn'

John Patrick Gatta

"Thank God for Taylor Swift, who is another strong young woman who takes no prisoners. She knows the difference between right and wrong, and the injustices against women and the inequality."

WOMEN WHO ROCK

LOVE, TRUST AND MISTAKES

True children of the 21ST-century festival scene, MisterWives aren't strangers to main-stage hooks and anthemic beats, but they're still an organic live band at heart.

BY EMILY ZEMLER

A FEW YEARS AGO, MisterWives bandmates Mandy Lee and William Hehir found themselves walking home across the Queensboro Bridge at dawn. The pair had been in Manhattan, out late, when Lee's fake ID was taken away. After downing a few bodega beers in a Bank of America vestibule, they had the idea to trek home to Astoria from Bleecker Street. The sun rose in the distance as they crossed the bridge, and, like a scene out of a movie, the two musicians unveiled their hopes for the future.

"We were going to Governors Ball that day and talking about what it would be like to play it," Lee recalls, phoning from her apartment in New York, where the five-piece rock band is currently at work on their second album. "It was pretty cool to have it all come full circle and to play Governors Ball this summer. We felt like kids saying, 'Oh, one day.' I always remember that moment and think, 'Holy shit. We really are doing it.' If you told me on that bridge that things were going to come true, I would have laughed in your face. But we're really lucky. It's special. We don't take it for granted."

A lot has changed for MisterWives since that early morning jaunt across the Queensboro Bridge. The group, formed in late 2012 by Lee, Hehir, Etienne Bowler, Marc Campbell and Jesse Blum, didn't arrive on the indie scene with any particular vision. They were five people who liked hanging out together, and their aim was simply to make good music and, hopefully, find themselves on bigger and better stages.

"We all remember the first time we played together like it was yesterday," Hehir notes. "Mandy had written these amazing songs, and when we started jamming, everything just clicked. At that moment, we realized what we had was truly magical. Mandy writes all of the music, and every time she brings a new song to the table, we're blown away and immediately start demoing it. We try not to pigeonhole ourselves into a specific genre, so I think that allows us to experiment with new ideas and incorporate different styles in every song without worrying about what other people think."

The band signed with Photo Finish Records in 2013 and unleashed their debut EP, *Reflections*, in January of 2014. The songs immediately clicked with listeners, but it was MisterWives' live show that particularly compelled their new fans. It's been those performances—dynamic, propulsive bursts of energy—that have delivered MisterWives from their early days to now, where they are playing festivals like Bonnaroo and Governors Ball and headlining massive venues around the country.

"It's been pretty wild watching the evolution—not just of our show and how we perform, but how the crowds have grown," Lee says. "They keep getting bigger and bigger, which is amazing. We've been on the road for a couple of years now, from the first tour opening for Half Moon Run to the last headlining tour where we sold out Terminal 5. It was a pretty massive leap. And the show has grown." She pauses and laughs, "Oh, my God, I used to wear skirts onstage because I wasn't jumping around as much. But now I go absolutely nuts. So many things change as you grow, like your stage energy and your performance and how you sing."

Lee considers MisterWives' tour with Twenty One Pilots in 2014 as a pivotal turning point for the band. Watching the unbridled energy of their peers allowed MisterWives the opportunity to really let loose onstage. "I've never seen a show like that, really," Lee says. "It's something we strive for. Although, I'm not doing any backflips—those guys are insane."

One of the primary components of MisterWives' live performance is their refusal to use any sort of backing tracks onstage. The musicians aren't interested in bringing a computer along on tour to augment their playing, so every note that comes from the stage during a MisterWives show is live in that moment. The band, which now includes saxophone player Mike Murphy as its sixth member on the road, wants to create a genuine sound.

"It wasn't the goal," Lee admits. "We weren't like, 'We're going to be a *band* and we're not going to do tracks.' I didn't know they existed! I was super old-school with all the bands I'd been in. It was really organic and everyone just played their instruments. And then, we started to tour, and I was like, 'Wait a minute. How is that sound happening? They're not playing that!' I didn't realize it was such a common thing. It used to be

something that was shamed—if you used tracks you were like Milli Vanilli and Ashlee Simpson. It was a huge ordeal that could ruin your career, and now it's the norm."

She stops and then offers an amendment: "It works for other bands but, for us, honestly, being humans and feeling the energy and feeling each other and what the crowd is doing and having that liberty—I'd be scared not to have that. I want to connect with my bandmates and the crowd. Maybe I'm a little old school in that, but I think there's something so magical about feeling how you're playing and having that freedom."

"Touring over the years has helped us reinforce the idea that recorded and live music are two different animals," Hehir adds. "When we rehearse, we try and expand on what people have already heard on the album. One of the most fun things about being a band is that you can continue exploring new ways to play live. We arrange our songs differently than they are on the record. We also don't play to a click, so sometimes things might be a little rushed because we're all so excited onstage, and it comes across in how we play off one another."

The absence of backing tracks onstage means that the male members of MisterWives have had to learn how to sing since the release of the band's debut album, *Our Own House*, early last year. The album and its preceding EPs were built on layers of harmonies, since, as she writes, Lee aims to create interesting vocal textures. It's a goal that takes on one incarnation in the studio but is much more difficult to manifest on tour. None of the musicians, save for Murphy (and Lee, of course,) sung before joining MisterWives, and the past few years have been one long singing lesson.

"It's hard to play the drums and sing most of the major harmonies," Bowler says. "My head always feels glued to the microphone, but all I want to do is head-bang around and have some fun. Blending four male vocals with one female lead is sometimes hard because we can't always sing in the same range as Mandy." He jokes, "Although, our sound guy usually mutes the dudes and boosts Mandy. Still trying to figure out why."

"I feel bad," Lee laughs. "I'm like, 'I'm sorry I asked you how to do magic.' But they pull it off and they keep growing and it's really fun to watch. It would have been hilarious to be a fly on the wall in the early stages of trying to get vocals down when we started off as a band. I'm really proud of them and how they've grown. They seriously carry all the backing vocals. They have worked a tremendous amount to get their harmonies down."

The melding of the vocals and how the sound will play out live has influenced the way Lee is writing for the band's second album, which will arrive in early 2017. As of late July, Lee had written eight new songs, and the band demoed several with Bowler serving as producer. It's a bit early to assess exactly how the album will shake out, but the musicians do know what they want and what is influencing their choices.

"Whenever I write, I think, 'Is this something that's going to easily translate with the instruments we have now and the voices that we have now?'" Lee notes. "We want to make sure we can pull it off live. We take that seriously—keeping that energy alive."

"Performing in front of thousands of people while they all sing the words is not only something worth writing about in itself, but it's moments like those that stick with us during the writing process," Bowler adds. "We can really imagine how a crowd will sing and participate with a song, and we keep that in mind when coming up with parts and new jams. With this next record, we really just want to make the best music possible that is true to ourselves while simultaneously pushing boundaries, and go places we have never been."

Lee, who says the album so far is about "love, trusting and making mistakes," has been consistently penning new music since MisterWives returned from Bonnaroo in June. They were planning to tour with Walk the Moon this summer, but the dates were canceled at the last minute. It ended up being a blessing in disguise for the group, who ended up spending August locked in the basement recording studio at Bowler's parents' house. It's was a relief for Lee, who found herself unable to write while on tour.

"I tried and I failed miserably," she sighs. "I need to be very much alone with the piano. So I haven't really written anything over the last two years. I got home and it just poured out of me. It was nice to remember that this is why I write music. On the first album, I had writer's block and there were time constraints, and I was thinking about all these expectations and people I had to make happy. It's been really nice just writing because I need to and not thinking about anything else."

One song in particular has been especially cathartic for the singer. Lee's brother was diagnosed as bipolar a few years back, and it's been an ongoing challenge for her. "It's been a really intense summer of him being in and out of psych wards and helping him," she explains. "So I wrote a song for him. It's about mental illness. It's a tough song to talk about, but it's really important to me and to my family. But that's what music is there for. I'm really lucky I have this outlet to write about my feelings. As silly and clichéd as that sounds, it's true."

That sentiment seems to remind her of something, and she offers a possibility for why fans continue to connect with MisterWives' music. "I hope they can use it for whatever hardships they're going through and realize that we're all going through many different things, and music is there to connect us and lift each other up and make us feel like we're not alone," she notes. "This album isn't all sad—there are songs about the band and how we've grown. There's a lot of songs about hope and love and fear. I don't want anyone to feel alone, and that's what music is here for and that's what we're here for. We're one big unit that can get through anything."

In June, as MisterWives made the pilgrimage to Tennessee to perform at Bonnaroo, that feeling was markedly clear. The band was given a late-afternoon slot on the festival's main What Stage, which the band still can't believe happened.

"It's one of the only festivals we've played where people camped out for four days, and there is something really special about that," Hehir says. "Music is all about building communities and bringing people together, and Bonnaroo definitely proved how amazing that can be."

"It was especially amazing for me because I had played Bonnaroo eight years ago with a small band on a small stage in front of small people," Bowler notes. "To come back and play the main stage was a real moment for me to recognize how far we've come. I may have cried." He adds, "It wasn't raining that day so, yeah, I probably cried."

The musicians stayed on the festival grounds long after their set had ended. As LCD Soundsystem took the stage—the same stage that MisterWives themselves had played on only hours earlier—the band climbed onto the roof of their tour bus, which was parked nearby.

"We opened the fire escape and got on top of the bus and danced our asses off," Lee says. "It was amazing—definitely a moment all of us will never forget. That whole day was so magical. It was one of the best moments of our lives. Bonnaroo is a really unique festival because it's all about the music, which music festivals should be, but there's usually a lot of other stuff going on. This is just everyone there, smelling terrible, dirty as hell, and having the best time ever by watching music. That's something we can really connect to."

WOMEN WHO ROCK

THE BOYS (AND GIRLS) OF

SUMMER

The Infamous Stringdusters set out to break free from the boys' club when they invited a handful of female voices to join them on their latest studio album—and ended up busting down some bluegrass boundaries along the way, with the help of Nicki Bluhm and Ryan Adams.

BY RYAN REED

PHOTOGRAPH BY DYLAN LANGILLE

THE INFAMOUS STRINGDUSTERS were gathered at Nashville's Sound Emporium Studios, counting down the intro to backwoods bluegrass scorcher "Run to Heaven," when they received an urgent phone call. It was Crooked Still singer Aoife O'Donovan, whom the band had requested to sing on the finished track, an eventual standout on their sixth LP, *Ladies & Gentlemen*. The Dusters were hoping the song's key was appropriate for her range—but since she'd been overseas and hadn't given the final word, they planed to roll the dice and record blindly. "We said, 'We'd better take that call,'" guitarist Andy Falco offers with a laugh a few months after the album's release. "She gave us the key. And it was a different key, so thank God."

It's a miracle that *Ladies & Gentlemen*, an eclectic collection in collaboration with a crew of female vocalists, even exists one year after that well-timed phone call. The process, which Falco calls a "logistical puzzle," was filled with nonstop coordination, a few false starts and several moments of wondering, "Are we really going to pull this off?" After five days of recording the basic tracks in Nashville last summer, the true work began—assembling their dream team of frontwomen.

The dizzying lineup unites bluesy folk-rockers (Joan Osborne), R&B belters (Joss Stone), singer-songwriter legends (Mary Chapin Carpenter), country hit-makers (Lee Ann Womack) and prog-grass all-stars (Sarah Jarosz and Sara Watkins). And all of these musicians—some longtime friends, some strangers—were eager to accept the challenge of becoming honorary Dusters. During the band's first decade, the all-male quintet—Falco, bassist Travis Book, fiddle player Jeremy Garrett, dobroist Andy Hall and banjoist Chris Pandolfi—has developed into

a startlingly versatile unit live in the studio: Like their fellow string-band virtuosos, the Dusters have rattled the foundations of bluegrass by weaving Americana, rock and jamband influences into a style that's difficult to categorize. With *Ladies & Gentlemen*, they tailored songs to specific vocalists—a unique strategy that expanded their sound even further.

The female collaboration concept had been kicking around Camp Duster since Falco joined the band in 2007, replacing original guitarist Chris Eldridge, who fled to join Chris Thile's Punch Brothers.

"The first thing I can remember is the first session I did as a Stringduster—we did a demo session for an incredible singer-songwriter named Sarah Siskind [Book's wife]. We did it live, and they were her songs. We had such great fun doing that session. I don't think any of that music has been released, but it was an early thought that this would be a cool thing to do. Flash-forward several years: Joss Stone, who is a friend of mine, came to one of our shows in New York and jumped onstage to sing a tune with us. We thought it would be cool to do a track with her. Then we thought it would be cool to do an album. Then we thought it would be great to have several guests."

By 2015, the Dusters had earned enough clout in the music industry to make that dream a reality. They'd become staples of the jam and bluegrass circuits, with enough mainstream appeal to earn a Grammy nod in 2011. They'd even founded their own three-day music gathering, The Festy Experience, based near their one-time home of Charlottesville, Va. Using their own connections—and the skillful persuasion of their management team—the band plunged forward with the idea, recruiting the perfect voices to match each of their tunes.

"It's a massive undertaking to put together all these guests with everybody's schedules," Falco says. "There were some folks we reached out to who were maybe making their own record or were on tour and weren't able to make it work. But when you go into a record like this, you have many more songs than you expect to release and you reach out to X amount of singers, hoping that a certain percentage of the people you asked would be able available to make a complete album. Then you place a lot of songs to the singers that were able to do it.

"There were a few singers on there that we'd never met but asked to do it," Falco continues. "It's probably one of those 'Our people called their people and they did lunch' kind of things. But they were people we really admired, so we reached out that way. Joan Osborne, for example, none of us had ever met. But we all loved her work, so she came up as someone we thought would be really cool to ask. Most of them, though, we called ourselves, friend-to-friend."

Falco credits producer Chris Goldsmith, who coordinated the complicated logistics of recording the songs, as the album's MVP. Without the luxury of having all the singers in one studio, Goldsmith closely monitored the women's touring schedules, often arranging to meet and record near his home in California. Several vocals were recorded independently and emailed over. Goldsmith even flew to New York and hunkered down there for one session.

That grueling process paid off. With its clean contours and wide textural scope, *Ladies and Gentlemen* marks another chapter in the band's evolution away from traditional bluegrass sounds—one that began with their third LP, 2010's *Things That Fly*. That album—highlighted by a string-band remake of U2's anthemic "In God's Country" and their spunky, Grammy-nominated instrumental "Magic #9"—incorporated new instrumentation (organ, viola) and more polished production elements.

And The Infamous Stringdusters have continued to experiment and take risks. For 2012's *Silver Sky*, they worked with producer Billy Hume, best known for his work with rappers like Nas and Ludacris. They've also showcased their range with cover tunes during their highly improvisational shows, tackling everything from the Grateful Dead's "Scarlet Begonias" to Lorde's ubiquitous electro-pop hit "Royals." (They recorded studio versions of some fan favorites for last year's wide-ranging *Undercover* EP.)

Another major shift came in 2011, with the departure of founding mandolinist Jesse Cobb. While the band originally intended to find a replacement, they realized they "really clicked" as a quintet, utilizing more space to declutter their songs.

"There is a slight rhythmic shift, a little bit of an adjustment in the way you approach the rhythm," Falco admits. "We were able to fill that void with what we already had. It felt right to us, and it opened up a lot of space. In a band like ours, there are a lot of soloists. It's no slight against Jesse, but having one fewer soloists isn't a bad thing in our band."

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COMPARE THE Dusters' 2007 debut, *Fork in the Road*, to *Ladies & Gentlemen*, and the shift is startling. These are the most disciplined and accessible songs in the band's catalog, with the female voices unearthing soul and charisma—from the jazzy "Have a Little Faith" (featuring Stone's bombastic croon) to the hooky "Won't Be Long" (guided by Sarah Jarosz's deft vocal leaps).

"The ladies all really put their own touches on the songs, and that wasn't micromanaged by us," Falco says. "We sent them the tracks with us singing them, just to give them an idea of the melody, and it sounded weird because it wasn't keyed for us. They all took that and brought it to the next level by putting their own spin and touches on it. It made it feel more like a collaboration. Every time we would get a track back, we didn't know exactly what to expect.

"Over the years, there have been so many dudes in our band, so it's nice to bring a little more of that [female] perspective to the songs," he adds. "It was a challenge, too, writing songs for this album—trying to be sensitive and take on a different point of view."

The Dusters faced another challenge in figuring out how to tour behind the album. Would they bring out different singers at different shows? Handle the vocals themselves? The solution ended up being obvious: hit the road with their unofficial sixth member, Nicki Bluhm. The Gramblers singer-songwriter, who adds a gentle twang to "Still the One" on the album, has been in the band's orbit for several years, having joined the Dusters a while ago for a winter ski tour.

"It was gnarly," she says of the trek. "We went out without our drummer because we thought they wanted a more mellow, string-band type thing. We were in my little Ford E-150 white cargo van and had to add a jump seat to it. And when you go on those tours and face the weather, you really bond. The two bands really just hit it off, and we all fell in love with each other. We've developed a relationship over the years by seeing each other at shows and festivals, and have become brothers and sisters. They had us play their festival, and we just kept doing stuff together."

Bluhm says that singing "Still the One" and touring with the Dusters was "in the stars"—an extension of the good vibes they'd accrued years earlier on the road. "When they approached me to sing a song on their album, I was totally honored. It's ironic because the song is so opposite of what was going on with me in my life at that time," admits Bluhm, who recently split from her husband and creative partner Tim. "But the cool thing about performing other people's songs is that you get to escape your own life for a little while and be in somebody else's.

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Against the grain: Atom Willard, Inge Johansson, James Bowman, Laura Jane Grace (l-r)

WOMEN WHO ROCK

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

On the new Against Me! album, *Shape Shift with Me*, Laura Jane Grace continues the powerful narrative she began with *Transgender Dysphoria Blues*. **BY JAAN UHELSKI**

IT'S NOT EVERY day that one finds a 6-foot-2-inch tattooed woman with messy black eyeliner, who looks like a goth cross between Janis Joplin and Courteney Cox, with a smidgen of Cat Power, combing through the library stacks—unless one is a patron of the Oak Park Public Library.

Against Me! singer Laura Jane Grace has been a regular at the high-ceilinged, eco-friendly library since last October, when she moved from St. Augustine, Fla., to this pretty little suburb with tree-lined streets, Victorian architecture and yoga studios, 10 miles west of Chicago.

It's where Grace is calling from today, and the location is more symbolic than by chance, like so many things in her life—from her tattoos and the Traveling Wilburys signature-model guitar her dad bought her because of her unabashed love for fellow Floridian Tom Petty to the numbers embedded in her songs and the "Gender Is Over" T-shirt she wore at last year's Reading Festival.

"I'm at the Oak Park library, a block away from Ernest Hemingway's birth home," Grace says in a soft voice. (After all, she is at the library.) "I moved here specifically because of that detail. I thought it would be an inspiring setting to live in while I finished writing a book."

After completing her Emmy-nominated AOL series, *True Trans*, Grace turned her attention to writing her memoir (with the help of *Noisey* writer Dan Ozzi), *Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock's Most Infamous Anarchist Sellout*. If that wasn't enough, then she was simultaneously writing lyrics for Against Me!'s seventh studio album, *Shape Shift with Me*, switching back and forth between the two projects as if she were programming a feedback loop—using each as fodder for the other, reflecting themes, anecdotes and wounds like a tilted carnival mirror. When the going got too tough with the soul-singeing memoir, she'd take a "break" and write some lyrics. "After writing a book, lyrics were easy," Grace says with a sound that's caught between a laugh and a cough.

Was she ever worried that Against Me!'s music would get lost in the shuffle with all the attention focused on her gender reassignment?

"Maybe a little, at first," Grace says carefully. "But my band has been 100-percent behind me on this. What can I say? I'm a narcissist. But we need love, too."

And, by all accounts, Against Me!'s current lineup—longtime guitarist James Bowman, bassist Inge Johansson and drummer Atom Willard—give her all the love she needs.

That wasn't always the case. Shortly after she came out as transgender in a magazine interview, AM's drummer Jay Weinberg left the band. Then, Andrew Seward, her bassist for more than 10 years, followed, ostensibly to open a Tex-Mex restaurant in Gainesville, Fla. Maybe it wasn't genderphobia, but Grace's admission was like a butterfly effect, sending out ripples whose reverberations are still being felt. But the most positive effect—a wave, more than a ripple, really—was that it

unleashed something in Grace that allowed her to be herself for the first time ever.

"I'm not sure I had a choice. I had to confront who I was or kill myself," she says simply. "But finally admitting it was very liberating and made playing music fun for me again, and it let me really write from the heart for the first time and not give a shit about expectations."

However, that didn't mean it was a seamless process. Working on the book—which is based almost wholly on seven boxes of journals Grace has been keeping since she was in the third grade—stirred up a lot of old ghosts for the musician, resulting in the raw emotions that produced songs such as "Haunting, Haunted, Haunts."

"I definitely feel haunted, re-reading everything and reliving stuff to write the book," Grace admits. "There was a complete moment of breakdown at the end when I was done writing and realizing all my past mistakes and thinking: 'OK, how do I live with these things about myself that are there on paper and that are true?' That was part of wanting to write a book, to try to alleviate carrying some of that weight, not even metaphorically, just physically the weight of journals—having to carry them around to concerts or wherever I go.

"When my publisher is done using them to fact-check the book, I'm going to burn them all," Grace says resolutely.

But it's not as easy to burn her past. For the last 19 years, Against Me! has been one of punk rock's most infamous agitators, occupying that rarified space between art and politics—believing those early revolutionary notions spewed by anarchist punks such as Crass, The Clash and Sex Pistols, as well as the socially conscious Fugazi, that music could change the world—and doing their best to carry that torch a little further down the road.

But, in 2012, the personal became political when Tom Gabel publicly announced in the pages of *Rolling Stone* that he intended to live as a woman, changing his name to Laura Jane Grace—the name his mother would have given him had he been born a girl—and taking his mother's maiden name as his surname.

The band released *Transgender Dysphoria Blues*, one of 2014's most acclaimed albums, and certainly a spiritual descendant of Lou Reed's "Candy Says" and "Walk on the Wild Side," as well as The Replacements' "Androgynous." But, for Laura Jane Grace, the walk wasn't so much wild as it was disconcerting and confusing, if not morbidly depressing.

Grace's wife, Heather Hannoura, the mother of their daughter, left after telling *Cosmopolitan*, "I know other couples split up over this, but I never considered leaving."

"What people don't know is that after coming out, there's always a comedown," Grace says, as if that explains everything. Some landings aren't as gentle as others, but all are fraught with emotional highs and lows. "It was a roller coaster, really."

"The statistic is that 41 percent of trans people attempt suicide in their life, and I'm part of that statistic," Grace said in the final episode of *True Trans*, later admitting on *WTF with Marc Maron* last year that she had attempted suicide with a combination of pills and alcohol. ("I had a suicidal nervous breakdown a year after coming out. And I just dissolved as a person.")

Nobody knows what to expect from transitioning, despite the initial feelings of euphoria and relief at finally making the decision to do so. There isn't a set of rules about how to live as a transgender person. "Most of the things I learned were from YouTube videos or fans who were transgender and would talk to me after my shows," Grace says.

While the 10 songs on *Transgender Dysphoria Blues* documented Grace's identity crisis and her journey to find herself, it became clear that this was something that wasn't so much a gender issue as a human issue—every single person struggles to become themselves, whatever that means to each one of us. Grace's dysphoria, which she has suffered with since she was a child, became a towering metaphor for declaring one's true self. It's why the album became Against Me!'s highest-charting record ever, resonating loudly with fans and a bevy of new believers, and fueling discussions from the misogynistic punk world to the mainstream: Laura Jane Grace was having a cultural moment as well as a personal one. That was why broadcaster Larry King wanted to interview her, and why *Cosmopolitan* asked her to document her first year as a woman for the freewheeling, sex-tastic female-centric magazine. Now, Grace counts Joan Jett as a friend and writing partner, and texts Tegan and Sara regularly. Bernie Sanders even used AM's "Unconditional Love" at his rallies.

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TRANSGENDER DYSPHORIA BLUES revealed what it was like to come out as transgender, but *Shape Shift With Me*, out on September 16, shows how to live and love as a transgender person, while retaining some sort of a personal life. In short, it's a relationship record, both the unraveling and the aftermath of that process—Laura Jane Grace's own *Blood on the Tracks*.

Grace often thinks about her relationship with Heather and wonders if there was a period during all this upheaval and the divorce proceedings when she could have still made it work. "This is obviously me writing a record while still being desperately in love with somebody, but not being able to be with that person," Grace says. "I guess like Liz Phair's *Exile in Guyville*, the Stones' *Exile on Main Street* and The Streets' record *A Grand Don't Come for Free*, this record has that same arc of emotion. The fact is that it *is* possible to feel love for someone while also feeling hate. I'm in my second divorce. So what does love really mean?"

She explores that topic over most of the 12 songs on *Shape Shift With Me*, from the "Should I stay or should I go" theme of "12:03" to the pouty indignation of "Boyfriend" to the deep sadness of "Crash," to "Suicide Bomber," which Grace explains "is meant to be taken as realizing that you're kind of a monster still begging someone to love you." But the real heartbreaker is the wistful lament of "All This (And More)," on which she sings, "I somehow ended up missing your kind of crazy more than the rest."

"Luckily, songwriting is the exercise of dealing with this feeling that you feel, and sometimes you can recognize that that was a messed-up way to feel," she says.

Messing up things further, sometimes the wires get a little crossed—or, more accurately, the hormones.

"That was such an eye-opening thing for me to realize. I know what it's like to have a body filled with testosterone and I know what it's like to have a body filled with estrogen, and I understand those things actually influence you—just in the same way another drug or alcohol would. They change the way you think about things and the way you handle things."

She adds with a laugh, "Sometimes I don't know which side is writing the songs. Are certain emotions inherently male or inherently macho? Trying to figure out if I'm being influenced by testosterone versus being influenced by estrogen is a trip."

It's clear which side wrote "Norse Truth," a song that begins with the chant: "Tits out for the boys... Hard cocks... Hard cunts... Line 'em up."

"For me, it's recognizing the disconnect and then wanting to exploit the thing," she says simply when asked if she is uncomfortable singing that as a woman. "What I can say is I'm much nicer as a transgender woman," she admits. "I was a

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GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT

"The Queen of Funk" opens up about her battle with cancer in her new Barbara Kopple-produced documentary, *Miss Sharon Jones!* BY MIKE GREENHAUS

SHARON JONES' LIFE story had all the makings of a classic music documentary long before she was diagnosed with Stage 2 pancreatic cancer. Born in North Augusta, S.C.—on the edge of the Georgia town that produced "The Godfather of Soul" himself—Jones was famously told that she was "too fat, too black, too short and too old" for stardom before her career kicked into gear at age 40, after a serendipitous meeting with future Daptone founder Gabriel Roth. And, along with Roth and her mighty Dap-Kings, Jones has spent the past 20 years not only shattering each and every one of those glass ceilings, but also ushering in a soul revival whose cultural impact is only outweighed by its funkiness. Yet Jones didn't feel the need to bring her story to the silver screen until 2013, when she feared her unprecedented second act might be cut short.

"Once I knew that the cancer was there, I told my management that I wanted to let my fans know what was going on in order to have a connection with them," the now 60-year-old Jones says during an intense promotional blitz for the new Barbara Kopple-produced documentary focusing on her courageous battle, *Miss Sharon Jones!* "That was my therapy."

It's been a tough few months for the singer, who announced that her cancer had returned during a *Miss Sharon Jones!* screening at the Toronto International Film Festival in September of 2015. What could have been a well-deserved victory lap has turned into a vivid reminder of her recent struggles and a powerful rallying call, as Jones makes the rounds supporting the candid film while combating the disease. In recent months, her cancer has advanced to Stage 4 and spread to her lung, liver and lymph nodes.

"Being able to see this movie is getting me through this again—the other day, I was like, 'I can't do this,'" Jones admits without ever losing that classic frontwoman fight in her voice. "I have to allow myself to have a pity party; I have to allow myself to cry. I have to allow myself to feel bad. But when the medication starts to affect me vocally, or affect my energy—when I get onstage and feel that I can't dance—seeing the movie helps me go, 'OK, Sharon, get on up. Get back out there. You're not in pain if you got that energy—get onstage and do the best you can.' That's where I'm at now. It's giving me that extra boost."

Despite relying on a cocktail of medicine every day, Jones has continued to tour with the Dap-Kings—and fills in the rare holes in her schedule with interviews, screenings and appearances tied to *Miss Sharon Jones!*'s release that would certainly wear out musicians half her age with a clean bill of health. After wrapping up a few more press obligations on this hot July day, she will head to Holmdel, N.J., for a stop on the Dap-Kings' uber-funky summer shed run with Hall & Oates and Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue. The group's middle slot between the two bands feels like a nice encapsulation of their place in the music industry. She's also continued to record, releasing three albums in the past two years: her sixth full-length, *Give the People What They Want*, the pan-denominational Christmas album *It's a Holiday Soul Party* and a soundtrack for her film.

"It's a struggle. The chemo has a certain effect—like neurology in my feet when I'm standing," she admits. "It came back in three different spots. They had me on the patch. I'm getting ready to cut back on a lot of the pain medication I've been taking. That's the difference. I'm doing these shows, feeling a little loopy and really lethargic. I talked to the doctor and tonight we're going to cut the medication from 50 to 25."

* * *

JONES RECEIVED HER INITIAL cancer diagnosis in the spring of 2013 and, soon after, her longtime manager Alex Kadvan reached out to Barbara Kopple about capturing her story. Kopple, 70, is a singular voices in modern documentary filmmaking. She's a two-time Academy Award-winning director whose most decorated films, *Harlan County, USA* and *American* Dream, concern a Kentucky miners' strike and the Hormel Foods strike, respectively. She also explored celebrity culture with the lauded Woody Allen doc *Wild Man Blues*.

Kopple had heard of Jones before Kadvan reached out through VH1 connections, though she admits that she didn't know much of her work beyond radio tracks like "100 Days, 100 Nights." "The first time I met Sharon, we were filming one of the most transformational and intimate moments of her life—when she's having her head shaved, something that is so familiar to so many cancer patients," Kopple admits. "It was just the most extraordinary time to meet somebody because we totally bonded during something that was so tough and difficult."

Jones allowed Kopple almost complete access into her life from 2013 until the film wrapped last year. "Woody Allen holds things back and, when I did *Wild Man Blues*, he didn't want me to show him shaking hands with people, then running to wash his hands because he had a phobia about germs," she says. "The beauty of Sharon is that this is who she is in real life. She's the real deal. She is a genuine article. She's just this wonderful, poised, raw, raunchy, fantastic musician and singer. She's an open book—the only thing she didn't want me to film is her getting out of bed."

As Kopple traced Jones' recovery, she followed her to doctors appointments, talked with her extended Daptone family and even accompanied her to try on wigs. They attended the Grammys together and traveled to Augusta for a victorious homecoming show. Jones says that her journey has reinforced her faith, and one of the film's most poignant moments finds her preparing

for her 2014 return to the stage by testing out her voice in a church.

"I interviewed her backstage when she first came back at the Beacon Theatre in New York [on Feb. 6, 2014], and she hadn't performed in seven or eight months—she just didn't know who *this* Sharon was going to be," Kopple says. "She wanted to dance and she wanted to sing and she wanted to shake her hair, which she didn't have at that point, and she was really scared. She was holding a cup in her hand and her hand was shaking—then, suddenly, it was show time and she got next to the curtain. She looked like a prize fighter. I couldn't stop thinking about how resilient and alive she was. Sharon really sees things through the power of her voice. I knew she was going to be a big part of my life."

The film also doubles as a long overdue biography of Jones, who grew up the youngest of six children in Brooklyn's rough Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood after her mother relocated the family to the North. She spent time as a corrections officer at Rikers Island and was working as an armored car guard for Wells Fargo when she met Roth in 1996 while singing background on a pre-Daptone Lee Fields session.

"I was like, 'What does that curly-haired Jewish boy know about soul music?'" Jones says with a laugh of the initial meeting that would change the course of her career. "I just came from work, so I had on my Wells Fargo outfit. Every one of those [Daptone] musicians practices a ton in order to play this music, but you can't just learn soul. It's something that's inside of you—and you either got it or you don't."

As Roth expanded his reach to include the now-defunct Desco label and his current Daptone family, Jones gradually found herself blossoming into the matriarch of a community of musicians who would go on to form such revered acts as Lee Fields & The Expressions, Antibalas, The Budos Band, Charles Bradley & His Extraordinaires and many others. Jones' love for her multi-generational ensemble is palpable when she reminisces about meeting longtime Daptone drummer Homer Steinweiss when he was still a teenager.

Sharon Jones & the Dap-Kings, who released their first album in 2002 and crossed over into the mainstream a few years later, also emerged at the center of a funk and soul revival that echoed the hipster underground's desire to combat the instant gratification of the social media age with a yearning for things that are small batch and authentic. Crowned "The Queen of Funk" decades after she was told her time was over, Jones has managed to connect the dots between David Byrne, Lou Reed, Michael Bublé, Booker T. Jones, Joe Jackson, Dan Zanes, Rufus Wainwright, Grace Potter, The Gaslight Anthem and Tedeschi Trucks Band, who toured with her group in 2015.

She's even been courted by some of the very musicians who once shunned her because of her age and appearance. "Back in the day, they were just looking for boobs and thighs, a certain look," she says with a chuckle. "They know it, and the ones that don't, *eh*, I don't need to put it in their face. I just thank God because I know that he gave me a gift so that one day [people] would choose me for my voice, not the way I look."

Her success with the Dap-Kings wasn't immediate, though. Jones says that, for years, she had to travel to Europe to play her distinctive brand of American soul music. Closer to home, she credits the open-

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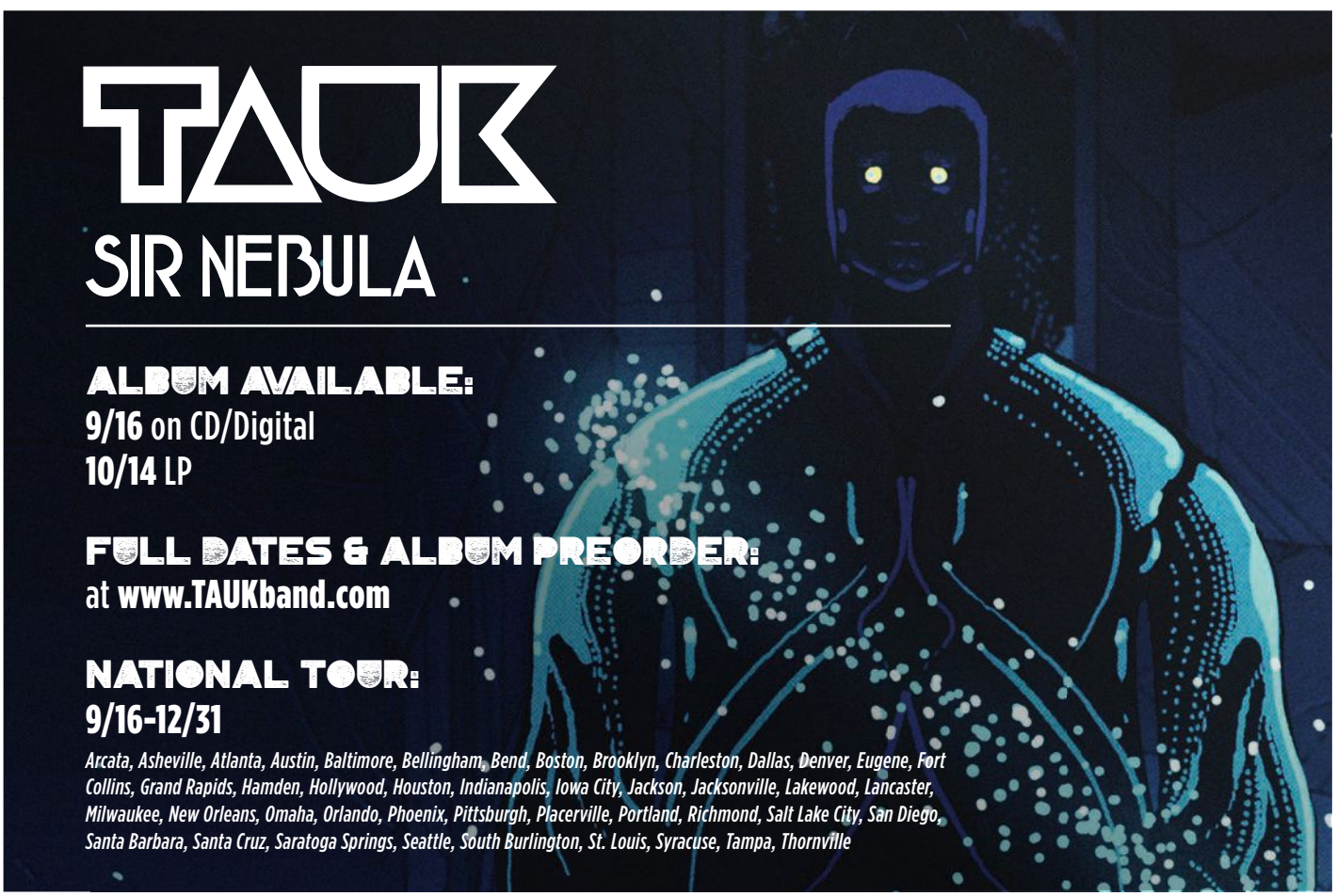
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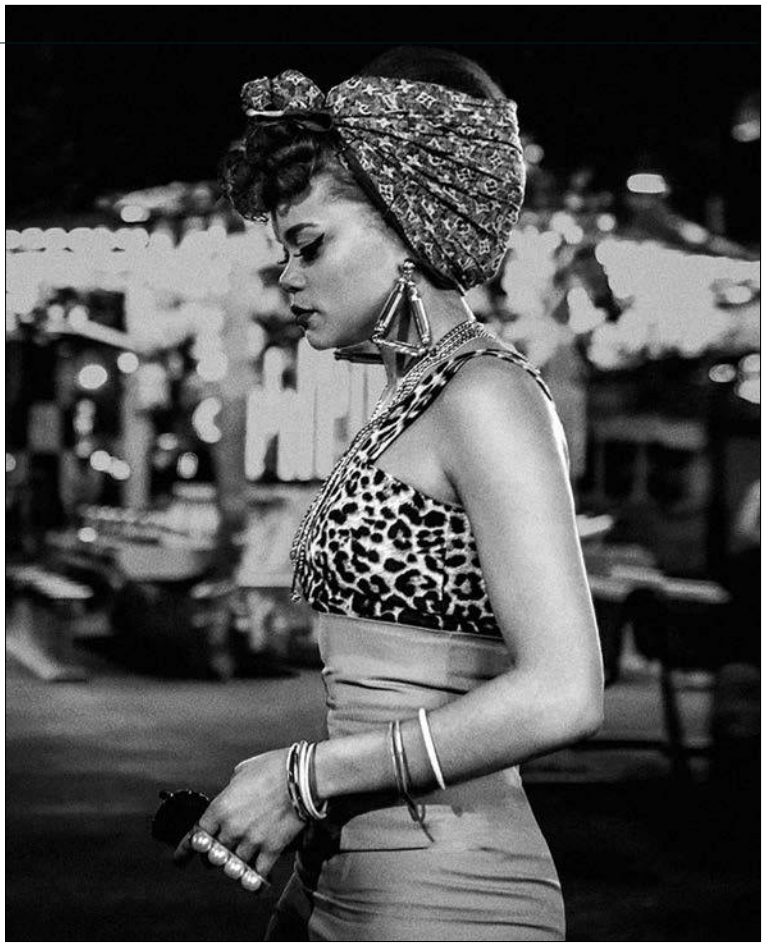
After The *Fall*

It may have taken years of soul-searching and a painful breakup, but Andra Day has gone from singing on street corners to rubbing elbows with Stevie Wonder and the Obamas without losing track of her true self.

BY JEFF TAMARKIN



There's one phone call that Andra Day will never forget. "Life-changing," says the singer, and she means that quite literally. "I was sitting in my tiny little box of an apartment and Stevie Wonder called me. It felt like a meteor hit my house." It's not that the call was completely unexpected, but that didn't make it any less surreal.

To back up a bit, Day had been singing in front of a storefront in Malibu, Calif., when a passerby took a video of her performance. It found its way to Kai Millard Morris, Wonder's wife at the time. "She loved my voice and played it for him—and he loved it, too," says Day. It took more than a year for anything to come of it, but, long story short, wheels started turning. Day soon found herself with a recording contract from Warner Bros., and high-profile industry figures such as Adrian Gurvitz and Raphael Saadiq wanted to produce and co-write with her. A few years went by and, finally, Day's major-label debut, *Cheers to the Fall*, was released in the summer of 2015.

The album, which sees Day deftly melding contemporary R&B with jazz, hip-hop and a classic soul vibe, received rave reviews. Critics started comparing Day to the likes of Billie Holiday and Amy Winehouse, while also hailing her as a true original with much to offer. The album found its way onto Billboard's R&B Top 10 and was ultimately nominated in the Best R&B Album category at the Grammy Awards, with her breakout single, "Rise Up," also earning a nod for Best R&B Performance. She didn't win, but, before long, Day had nabbed an NAACP Outstanding New Artist award, a slot at the BET Awards, and—most important to her—an invitation from the White House. "My parents got to meet the president and the first lady," she says. "It was crazy walking in and hearing the Obamas say, 'Oh, hey, Andra, so good to see you.'"

If it sounds like everything has been coming easily to the 31 year old from San Diego, born Cassandra Monique Batie, then that couldn't be further from the truth. Although she'd been singing in church since she was 11, attended a performing arts school and had the full support of her family, it took Day some time to find her way musically.

"In our house, we had Whitney Houston and Patti LaBelle, Motown records, playing all the time," she says. "I loved Nina Simone, Aretha Franklin, Lauryn Hill, Erykah Badu—all of these jazz and soul vocalists. Anybody who has their identity in their voice, I love. When I was young, I realized I could sing, but it wasn't until I discovered jazz that I liked the sound of *my* voice, the timbre of my voice. I accepted that I didn't have to sound like the R&B or pop singers on the radio—it was OK to have your own voice. The difficult part, more than discovering, was accepting that 'This is who I am, this is where I fit, this is where I want to experiment.' That's what took the longest time. It wasn't until my early 20s when I said, 'OK, you just gotta open your mouth and go back to what you love, and the sound that comes out is your voice.'"

When it came time to compose the songs that would comprise *Cheers to the Fall*, Day drew on her own life experiences for inspiration. She'd recently come out of a relationship in which, she confesses, "I had been the unfaithful person." The songwriting process was therapeutic. "I was dealing with the guilt of that and the pain I inflicted on that person, seeing how damaging it was not being honest and not being vulnerable," she says. "So I got to a place where I said, 'I never want to hide again. I never want to *not* tell the truth again.' Moving forward with the album, I said, 'I'm going to tell my story and I'm not going to hide it.'"

The hit "Rise Up," as well as other key tracks, like the album-opening "Forever Mine," reflected Day's emotional state at the time the album was being created. "Rise Up," ironically, wasn't even slated to be on the album; it was an older song she'd forgotten about. "There was another song in place that we were trying to get cleared, and there was some kind of drama with the song and the producer, so it didn't work out," she says. "Now, I'm glad it didn't work out!"

Day is just now starting to think about a follow-up record. Until it's time for that, she's enjoying performing live with her band—she turned heads on Bonnaroo's arena-size Which Stage in June—and she is looking forward to touring this fall. Even further down the line, she would like to get involved in filmmaking, perhaps as a producer or director. Day's worth keeping an eye on. "I've grown as a person and the way I perform has grown," she says. "I'm getting back into the swing of creating and writing, and whatever happens, happens."

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Something to

Bonnie Raitt and Grace Potter share a conversation on gender roles, identity and the power of music.

BY DEAN BUDNICK // PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAY BLAKESBERG

ON A THURSDAY afternoon in mid-August, just a day before returning to the road to begin late-summer tours that would extend into the fall, Bonnie Raitt and Grace Potter checked in from opposite coasts for a freewheeling 90-minute discourse. Potter, who called from California, is wrapping up a cycle in support of her self-titled record, during which she split from her longtime band the Nocturnals and took to the road with her new Magical Midnight Roadshow. Raitt, who was enduring 100-degree temperatures in Manhattan, had just appeared on *Good Morning America* and *Charlie Rose*, while promoting her latest album, *Dig in Deep*.

These two independent women have defined the terms of their own careers while pursuing their muses with verve and gusto.

Bonnie Raitt and Grace Potter first met when Potter was a wide-eyed 16-year-old, as she relates in this portion of this conversation, which also touches on the purported rivalries of women artists and the process of selecting opening acts.

GRACE POTTER: The first time I heard Bonnie Raitt was at the Sugarbush ski area [in Vermont], playing with Bruce Hornsby. I was there with my parents and some dear friends of mine, and it was an absolutely magical sunset show. Bonnie, you were wearing an amazing neon, blue blazer with the biggest shoulder pads I have ever seen.

BONNIE RAITT: Oh, yeah, it was the early '90s.

GP: It was a really incredible moment because I remember being a young woman, and I know this feeling happens to a lot of kids, but I just wanted to get up onstage and start singing. I was like, "I hope she's going to just hand me a microphone because I'm ready. I know all the words—let's do this."

BR: That is so great. Had I known, I would've brought you up.

GP: I was not prepared to be presented to the public at that point. I was a young kid and I think I was naked—I grew up in a hippie world—so I think it's good that we waited.

Later, when I was 16, I had a friend John [Rosenthal] who worked with you, and he called me at like 2 p.m. in the afternoon and said, "Bonnie's playing the Boston Fleet Pavilion. If you get in a car, if you can be here by her show, I have a ticket for you." So I jumped in a car with my CD in my hand.

I didn't think I was going to ever meet you, but I thought, "I'll just throw the CD at her and, hopefully, she'll see it." Then the mutual friend brought me backstage, ended up getting me in and I was able to meet you. So as a 16-year-old girl, I was backstage and I remember they were serving lobster, and you said something along the lines of: "They're serving food to match my hair," or something hilarious. You were being so funny. You were meeting and greeting a bunch of people, and you had at least 35 more people to meet.

I handed you my CD, and I loved what you said, "I gotta tell you something, Grace. I'm so happy to meet you. Thank you for your CD. You know what's going to happen with this CD? It's going to go in a really big pile of CDs that I have and, hopefully,

Talk About

I'll remember to look into it because you seem sweet and John's a friend of mine, but I can't make you any promises."

It was so honest and it was not a feeling of "Welcome to the dark side, girl. Good luck..." It was really a reassuring sense of the size of the universe, and how fortunate I was to be back there, giving you the CD as if that was the only reason you were there to meet someone.

I always took that with me, and now whenever people give me a CD, I actually have to be honest with them and say, "I'm not sure where this CD is going to end up at the end of the night. In fact, I'm going to hand it to this person here and she's going to hopefully bring it to my bus for me, but I can't be trusted to hold this."

It's really carried me through because, just like I wasn't able to walk up on stage and take the microphone and start singing at a Bonnie Raitt concert when I was seven, you can't just hand somebody famous your life story and expect that anybody's going to do anything for you. You have to just be great. I've always thought about that experience and how positive it was and how real it was, even though it was a very brief exchange. It was meaningful and it made me want to work harder.

BR: Oh man, that really moves me a lot, Grace. I don't think I've ever talked to anybody who had a story like that. Whenever anybody hands me a CD, I never get to hear what it's like from their point of view.

John Rosenthal is an activist for homeless people and handgun control. I've known John ever since the No Nukes concert in '79. He was arrested at the Stop Diablo Canyon nuclear plant demonstration that Jackson Browne and I played on the beach in the middle of the California coastline years ago. You met me after the show as part of a reception to raise $10,000 for various groups. That was what was going on and that's where the lobster came from because we don't get it every night.

I remember hearing about you from John, and later hearing your name from the wildfire that happens because I'm always on the lookout for great, new, under the radar artists who I can be inspired by and I can have open a show or I can do a song with or I can talk about in interviews. Your name was given to me by a few people as a spitfire with "incredible talent as a singer and a great B-3 player, with a killer band." I was told, "Wait until you hear her—you're going to be so happy that she's on the scene."

And that is exactly what happened. You lived up to everybody's ravings. It was like when somebody first told me, "Yeah, there's this group called Little Feat," or "There's this guy called Gregg Allman—he's pretty good."

I was so relieved and felt so great that somebody loved R&B and soul music, and was so original and was such a great writer. I saw some interviews—once you become a fan of somebody, you try to find out more about them to get what they're like as a person. Reading those interviews, you were so real and I liked your whole vibe. I just think you comported yourself with so much great class and spunk. You're also so clearly established as a significant instrumentalist and singer as well as a bandleader and artist. That performance in Vegas, that *Divas* show [with Heart]—I was just proud because I feel like you're coming from my part of the subculture. I've been happy to see you get the response you're getting.

GP: Wow, that's pretty frigging great to hear. Some of the women that I have befriended in California since I have been out here working and living, say, "I can tell that you're one of my tribe," or "I'm so glad I found my tribe of women." There's this real sense of unifying people who can be happy for each other and can build each other up instead of waiting for some ball to drop and something to go wrong so they can move in for the kill.

I was warned, early on, that very few female artists want other females opening for them because, typically, what happens is that people feel that they need to choose: "Do I like the opener or do I like the woman I came to see?"

I do think that's a real thing. There were eras of my career where I did not have women opening for me. Not necessarily because I didn't want women, but because I was tired of dealing with the question and dealing with this sort of unfortunate reality that I think people feel they need to choose between one female or the other. It's like we're pitting ourselves against each other.

And no, I never felt that from you or a lot of other women, like Emmylou [Harris] and Patty Griffin—people who have become friends of mine in the industry. We are all always happy for one another when we see someone doing well. It doesn't anger me as much as it used to, but it just confuses me that anyone would ever think they needed to choose.

I do feel that certain people get put on the earth to do a thing, and if you're lucky enough to find that thing and are able to do it, then you should shine your light as bright as you possibly can. And you've been one of those lighthouses. You just are an example of someone who always knew your direction, followed it and set an example.

BR: Thank you.

I think it's important when you put together shows to have it be complementary. You don't want to have somebody on the bill who's presenting the same mix of songs. I try to make it so that if one tour is Richard Thompson, then another tour is Mavis [Staples] and another tour is an Appalachian singer named Sarah Siskind, whose voice just slays me. Then I think about my fans, who did they see me with last time, so I try and mix it up every time. Then, selfishly, I just want to hear Marc Cohn every night for a month. I want him to come out and sing "Crazy Love" with me and then, the next time, I want Richard Thompson again so I can sing "Dimming of the Day" with him.

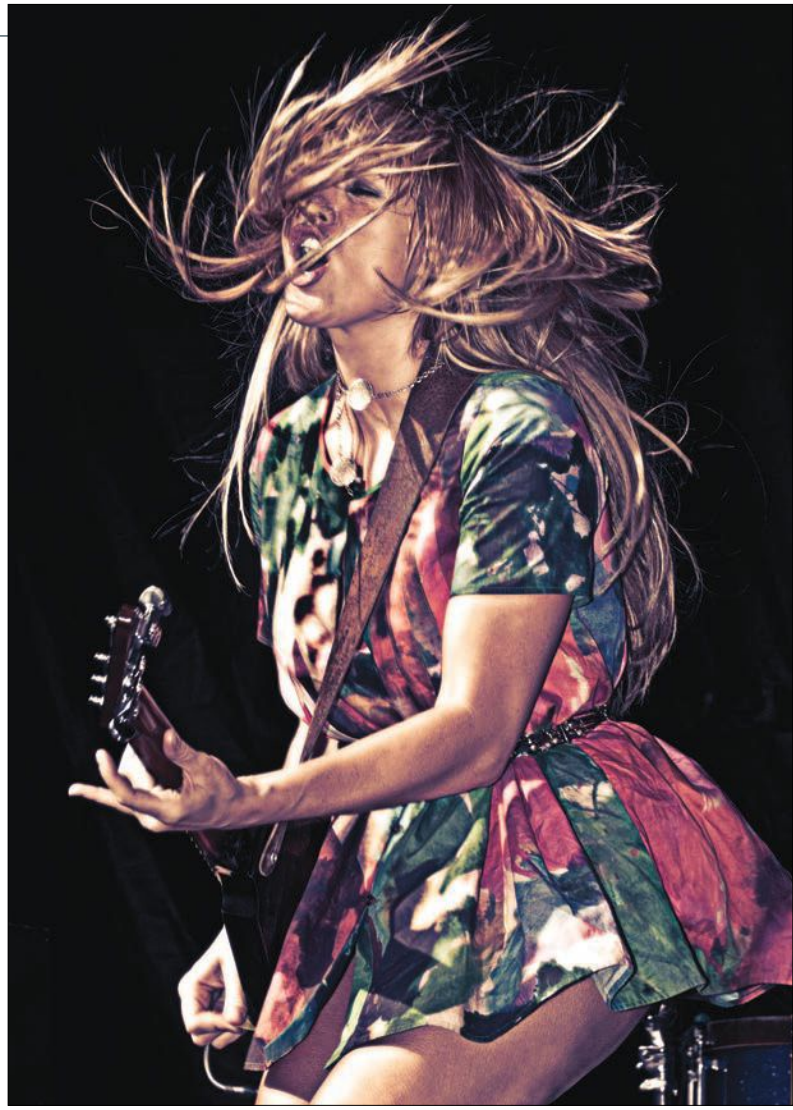
But I'm sure that what you describe is out there. Lilith Fair was a response to everybody telling Sarah [McLachlan] that nobody would come to see more than one woman on the show and she said, "Oh, really?"

Potter and Raitt also turned to the social responsibilities of artists and the relationship between music and politics in 2016.

GP: I came at it in a different time than you did, Bonnie. When I was 21 and just starting touring, I was basically told to keep my mouth shut and not talk about it. I remember being pulled aside by somebody who wanted to sign me and he said, "Just keep yourself out of politics. Don't even bother. We've already got one Bono—don't do it." Of course, whenever somebody tells me what to do, I do the opposite. [*Laughs.*]

I didn't end up signing with him, and I also went ahead and wrote one of my first songs that really captured what I believed to be the political atmosphere at the time. We were in the Bush era, so I wrote a song called "Ah Mary," which was essentially a euphemism, describing a woman who is actually sort of the state of our country. To this day, I have people come up to me and say that they didn't realize what the song was about and it then just clicked for them.

But at the time I got into rock-and-roll, there was a lot of fear-based songwriting and/or charged-up energy. I had to break the mold a little bit and step out of that if I wanted to say what I really wanted to say. I had to get creative with it.



BR: For me, I came on the tail end of the '60s, which had lots of political music with Bob Dylan, who had a huge crossover hit with "Blowin' in the Wind." Before there was Woodstock, there was the Newport Folk Festival and the folk-music revival of the late '50s, early '60s. All the college kids were grabbing guitars and singing at peace marches and civil rights movement marches with people like Mavis and the Staples Singers.

Those songs catapulted music to the forefront of the counterculture and what was happening against the war and with the civil rights movement. Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth" or any number of other political songs, like "Eve of Destruction," were front and center in the culture as consciousness changed about music's role.

I came out of that folk-music revival but that's also when I fell in love with things like Motown and The Beatles or the Stones. I loved all that stuff. I've always loved Fairport Convention as much as I loved John Lee Hooker. You didn't have to choose, and I still think you don't have to choose.

By the time I started playing, I identified with a lot of blues-roots music and that form. I didn't sing a lot of political songs on my records or in my shows but because I was doing a lot of benefits, I would put in political songs and I would be careful not to preach from the stage when it wasn't a benefit. I knew that would turn people off. I can't assume that all people have

the same political affiliation that I do.

Clearly, I'm progressive. I don't make any bones about it, but there's a time and a place for singing overtly political songs. I've written a couple that were out-and-out political like "The Comin' Round Is Going Through," on my new record. It got to the point where I said, "This is it: I want to write a Stones-kind-of rocker that I can play live and get the anger out about how money has hijacked democracy. And I'm gonna write it in a way that both sides of the spectrum can be pissed off about how this system is broken." Too many people at the top are controlling what's going on, on every level. It's not a democracy if everything's paid for. You have to buy your way in. It's an auction instead of an election.

I hand it to people like Don Henley or Sting with "They Dance Alone" or Jackson's songs or U2 or Bruce Cockburn. There are so many fantastic political writers who are still having resonance as much as The Clash did when punk music was a revolt. But if times aren't calling for a revolt, you have to come up with music that isn't pedantic and corny and polarizing. It's a delicate balance singing political music because most of it isn't very good. But when you get a great song and you land it and you mean it with all your heart, you can pull off singing it anywhere—benefit or not. I think the artists are the town criers for the culture. We have a responsibility as citizens to be able to speak out about things that are wrong.

GP: Bonnie, I love that new song. It's not always easy to get it right. It's easy for us to talk about it in theory, but I can think of too many songs and artists I won't name whose whole message is just to have a message.

I feel like there's a difference between saying something and writing a political song. Those are two different things. I've seen too many songs where the message gets in the way of the music. Being the town crier is a very important thing, but not if all you want to do is cry—if all you do is complain.

That's why it's our responsibility as true artists to find creative ways to make tough news and tough messages and the hard realities of life not just palatable but meaningful. It's not always easy to get it right but if it's got resonance and if it's got a message, then it's going to feel powerful and timeless, like Neil Young's "Ohio."

BR: Oh, man, what a great song.

GP: He wrote it, and then it was out on the radio the next week because he felt that moment was so important because of the timing. But now, here we are, decades later, and it still gives me chills because the energy behind it was important at that moment and it carried on, and made it continue to be important.

Potter later affectionately describes a bandmate as a feminist, which leads to an exploration of that term. During the recent presidential primaries, women of voting age in their late teens through early 30s expressed ambivalence toward being identified as feminists.

GP: For me, the stigma of the word came because, unfortunately, I wasn't properly educated about it. I grew up in this very progressive hippie town in Vermont. I just assumed that I was a feminist, but that I didn't need to talk about it or make a big deal because it was like, "Yeah, I've got this. I understand this and that about how I feel."

I've been doing a little bit more work and reading and understanding that there are many different layers of feminism, and it's not a bad word. It's really more that I was in this boys' club. One of my bandmates had just come from Goddard College, where he'd been playing in a backing band with an angry feminist who was using music as a soapbox, and the music was suffering for it. Not every artist who chooses to speak out is doing it necessarily in the most brilliant way, or the most compelling way.

I remember being young, 19, and psyched that I had a bunch of cool guys around that wanted to play music with me, and I sort of agreed with whatever they said. At that point, I didn't have anything beyond my parents being awesome, free-thinking, very outspoken, politically charged people, and a lot of powerful women in my life who I looked up to and thought were brilliant and had that leadership. So I kind of assumed, "Well that's good enough—I've done my work."

I was pretty lazy and the ambivalent, it's just sort of my generation's approach, which is basically that until we absolutely have to feel something, we're just going to read about it or tweet about it or read other people's tweets about it, and never really make a decision. I'm only now coming into a time and a place in my life where I'm understanding what kind of feminism is useful and what kind is potentially degrading, and how to speak with people who want to have the conversation but don't know how to.

I guess I'm more of an approachable feminist than some of the folks that I've met but, at the same time, there's a very important balance there. I'm just learning it because I'm not worried about being in the cool boys' club anymore and being like, "Yeah, that lady is stupid. She's talking about her vagina." It's not all the same.

There is first-wave feminism and second-wave feminism and third-wave feminism. Apparently, I'm more in the second wave of sexually free, wild woman. I do and say whatever the fuck I want until somebody calls me out on it. Every once in a while, it gets me into trouble and that's the learning curve that I'm in the midst of.

BR: That was so beautifully and articulately said and very illuminating, so I'll chime in from the perspective of the first wave.

Certainly, in the early part of the last century, there were suffragettes trying to get the vote and feminism was a strong thread running through my mother's generation and her mother's generation. But in the late-'60s when I was going to college in '67, along with the anti-war movement and other things, the feminist movement was mighty and strong.

We were challenging the whole idea of why would anybody have to get married in order to have children, or you're only fulfilled if you have a man in your life and you have to give up your career when it's time to raise children. It was a very revolutionary idea that men were supposed to take on half of the housework and that women were supposed to have half of the say in any political group. A lot of the anti-war groups and the co-ops still had meetings about the fact that women were expected to bring the snacks and clean up. There was a lot of tacit assumptions that women were going to be doing the bussing of the tables and refilling the coffee cups and doing laundry on the road—"Do you mind throwing my stuff in with yours?"

I have been a feminist since I was a little girl and knew that women could get the short end of the stick. I was a tomboy because of it, and I didn't identify with being a wife or a mother precisely because of it. I thought the playing field should be leveled and I didn't want to be told I was a "good guitar player for a girl"—all of that stuff. I came out of the first wave of the feminist movement; it was a very exciting time.

But there was a whole schism that started in the '60s and the '70s where some people were saying, "Bonnie, I thought you were one of us. What are you doing? Wearing makeup and tight jeans and high heels, you're just a victim."

I understood where they

were coming from. There's always been a need to be able to stand your ground and stand up for feminist principles and I understand that there are going to be some extreme versions of it that are off-putting, just like what you were saying about political music.

Now everything is relaxed a little bit and, hopefully, we can get more parity in the culture at large. Sure, it's fun to have somebody pull the chair out for you or open the door—it's charming. But where it really counts, where equality matters, is understanding what being a real woman and being a real man is and how much the two have blended, and having my masculine side being accepted and allowed—just as I accept the feminine side of men without calling them wimps or without them calling me butch.

It's important that everybody is a human being first, so let's celebrate the things that make us different. But feminism is a given.

GP: When I was in Qatar, I was asked to wear a burqa. It was very clear to me in that moment that there are certain times when it's cool to respect someone's culture, and there are other times where I can do what I want and be that American girl who insists on not wearing one. I ended up putting one on because I wanted to experience something other than the pretty much utter freedom I've had as a human.

When people used to ask me, "Are you a feminist?" I used to say, "I'm a humanist." But I think I had been blindly idealistic about not having to stand beside women who maybe have never experienced that level of freedom before. So I put that burqa on, and it was a humbling experience. It taught me a lot about what it feels like to be a human in a situation where there is still a long way to go and women are getting these circumcisions so that they can't experience pleasure. And that's in places that are one flight away. You can't drive there, but we can still feel as a human race, that it's happening and that it's not OK. It's an ongoing conversation but I'm happy to finally stand up and be counted. There was a long time where I thought I had done my work just by being a hippie but I'm ready to get back to the first wave.

BR: Good for you, Grace. Fantastic. Men and women—we all have to work for equality and tolerance and letting everybody have a chance at the full realization of what we're here for. I'm not going to come down on anyone's culture, but I feel that to not work toward bringing everybody up to the same level is conscience-robbing. We have a responsibility to keep working on solutions and alleviate injustices and suffering and war and pain. That's why we're here, to increase love and not just talk about it.

The discussion then turns to some challenges of maintaining one's style and identity within the music business.

GP: I just had this long conversation with my mom. I don't read articles and I don't read comment sections, but there was this one article that led her to say, "I just don't understand how people are still making a fuss about what you're wearing."

At the beginning of my career, I didn't know what I needed to be or what my place was in the world. I was still figuring it out and I didn't have any understanding of how far my music and my career was going to go. I only knew I had ambition. So I changed and grew as I became more aware of my sexuality and my presence as ultra feminine at times and ultra masculine at times.

I realized that, in the first five years of my career, I'd been leaning heavily on my physical appearance to be taken seriously. I would wear looser fitting jeans and plaid shirts and cowboy boots, and I'd keep my hair in my face and not wear much makeup—not because that's what I really wanted to do, but because I truly thought I was going to be taken more seriously.

I thought the second I put on lipstick, it would be a sign of my decline as an outspoken, politically charged person in the world, let alone a performer and a public figure. And later, I guess I was about 25 or 26, I remembered digging through my grandma's closet and playing dress-up and loving makeup and having to keep that isolated to the theater department at my school because, where I grew up, it was just not cool to wear makeup. There were no cheerleaders at my school—it was the opposite of most places. The cool girls wore Carhartts, Mudd boots and Patagonia and they knew how to drive a progressive shift tractor. [*Laughs.*] I had to claim my femininity and my sexuality in a really weird time and also very publicly.

I had a conversation with a musician who I really adore but she basically cornered me and said, "You're making a mistake. Who do you think you are wearing those miniskirts? Do you think anyone is going to take you seriously?" And it scared the living shit out of me. She was a little bit tanked when she told me that—and she later apologized—but, at the same time, it was like, "Is that true? Am I not a good musician if I'm in the sparkly dress that I saw in the window when I was driving and said, 'Fuck it, I'm buying that dress.'"

BR: I'm right there with you. When I started out, I was the daughter of a Broadway leading man [John Raitt], and I hung out at some of the theaters and some of the productions on Broadway. I loved dressing up in my mom's clothes and singing all the songs from the shows. I never had any interest in doing it as a living, but I did high-school musicals and I did talent shows. I watched everybody do stage makeup, so dressing up for onstage was just part of who my family was, as well as singing all the time and wide berths of music appreciation.

When I came up in the '60s, there were bell-bottoms and the whole English invasion. What happened was that someone like Anita Pallenberg looked so cool standing next to Keith Richards that she didn't have to be in a band, she just set the tone.

And then the fashion of the '70s was a reaction against consumerism, materialism and all those "isms" that we were responding to. Part of that was to respond by dressing in—not a unisex way—but a more casual way, the more natural look.

But I'm a redhead; I have really light eyelashes and eyebrows. I love wearing eye makeup and I love wearing great underwear. I'm from LA and Fredericks of Hollywood is down the street from my house. Makeup, hair and clothes are a great, creative way to express yourself. We all express ourselves by the tribe we're in, whether it's plaid shirts and work boots or four-inch heels and miniskirts. This generation of women can do whatever they want because they're going to stand strong and stand up for themselves and it's their prerogative what they want to dress like.

While I'm not judging anybody else for their style, I do think it's important to come across with some sense of dignity to your fans. If you're trolling for the bottom and just flinging it out there to sell sex because it's going to get you ahead, then you're going to have to pay for some repercussions when your body starts to sag, baby. You better develop a different skill set if you're only relying on your looks and your sexuality.

But having said that, we *are* sexual. We love to look good and look cool and look badass. Just look at Tina Turner, she's a strong woman inside and out—spiritually, musically and mentally as she is sexy. That's also why Beyoncé is such a groundbreaker, like so many other fantastic artists who are using their freedom to be able to express whatever they want and not have to answer for it.

There are more women in bands now than ever before. There are more great women on every musical instrument than there ever was before and it's a fantastic thing that we're not alone. When I grew up, I loved Memphis Minnie and Rosetta Tharpe on the guitar. I've been asked so many times who were my women role models, but I wasn't looking at whether musicians were men or women, black or white, or what instrument they played. Somebody was either great or they weren't.

Elsewhere in this issue, Rita Coolidge describes being told by male producers that the songs she had written were not quite complete, which she attributed to sexism—and which Potter has experienced as well.

GP: It's another piece of the puzzle like the head of the first label that I was almost going to sign with telling me, "You better not get political." I've been told throughout my career that my songs aren't done, and I need to co-write. It's infuriating and, now that I have left my band and am solo, I am still fighting the impression that the guys in my band wrote the songs.

It's an issue to this day. At first I really didn't want to think it had to do with being a girl. I actually thought it was because I was young and I was a country bumpkin and they wanted to sharpen me up and shine me up. I wanted the Hollywood thing, so I was very excited at first with the opportunity to co-write with people like T Bone Burnett and Mark Batson. I was thrilled to be moving in these circles, so I took it as a real opportunity tradeoff with kind of an insult to my own sense of artistry. That's an ownership that I have had to continue to learn how to take and, to this day, if I play any of the songs I've played for 15 years, they're often not thought of as Grace Potter songs, even though I was the writer.

BR: That pisses me off, Grace. I'm surprised and shocked and really sorry you had to go through that.

I remember Sheryl Crow called her second record *Sheryl Crow* because when *Tuesday Night Music Club* came out, everybody assumed that it was mostly those other guys who wrote it and that maybe she contributed some stuff.

I'm known as an interpreter, generally, and never had a band, so in my instance, people are assuming that the producer is picking the songs, the musicians and the arrangements. The public doesn't realize that I bring in all these songs and I've picked the producer as a collaborator because I like what they're doing lately and I want to go play in their sandbox a little bit.

I would never listen to a record company. I never would have signed a record deal if I thought they could have even a minute of input. That's not what everybody has and I've paid for it, because sometimes the record company refused to promote my records because I didn't have an album in a style that they liked. That's what you get for having independent artistic control instead of signing for money.

But I would say the biggest element of gender has come with knowing how to say what I need to say if something's not working with my band. If I want to shift something a little bit, but I'm not yet sure what I want, and I ask a couple of the people to try something, I have to watch the tone of my voice so I don't push the "mom button." [*Laughs.*]

In the beginning, when I was only 21 or 22, in a session with a bunch of professional guys who were much better musicians than I was, I still had specific tastes about what I didn't like about a horn part. I'd say, "Can I flip the trumpet and the saxophone on this part?" And the guy who arranged the horns was like, "Who the hell are you to tell me what to do?" There was a little bit of a youth thing, but there was also a little bit of being told what to do by a girl.

> I was warned, early on, that very few female artists want other females opening for them because, typically, what happens is that people feel that they need to choose: "Do I like the opener or do I like the woman I came to see?"
>
> **GRACE POTTER**

Years later, when I started having a track record, people respected me more. But in the beginning, it was very challenging to be a music director of my own stuff and trying to use the band and the instruments as a palette and being able to experiment. There was a little bit of resentment like, "Who does she think she is—she can't even play this instrument. Why should she be telling me what snare to hit?" But I had to get over that because when the musicians go away, the album still has my name on it and I'm the one singing the songs every night. So you just need to be strong about your artistic vision, and I try to work with people I really respect who get what I'm trying to do and help give me inspirational ideas. It's a wonderful experience if you don't put gender into it.

GP: You said an interesting thing about pushing the "mom button" because I sort of put my nurturing energy into my bandmates. I very much admire that learning curve you had—that opportunity to learn how to put your foot down without having to go into mom mode because, ultimately, that's what happened with me.

I'm now able to recognize it but it took me 10 years of "Why are they acting like babies sometimes?" It was because I fell back on the mothering thing to find my power. I found it in the nurturing spirit. It got me where I needed to go musically in the moment, but in the overarching story of life and growth, I have learned that it is absolutely not how to get things done. I don't have to put down the bitch boot or the mom boot. Instead, I can just be someone who is communicating a musical message. It really helps to make things clearer about what you are chasing musically when you can remove all of those roles from the conversation.

Reviews

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

Van Morrison

VAN MORRISON

Keep Me Singing CAROLINE

It's been four years since **Van Morrison**'s last studio album and decades since he's made one this consistently satisfying. *Keep Me Singing*, at times, feels like a lost Morrison classic from his '70s Warner Bros. heyday, while, at the same time, it's very much the deepest outpourings of an older man. He touches on nostalgia, sadness and loss—"Well, I got to go way back in my memory bank, see how it ought to be now," he sings on the title track, and in "Memory Lane," he confesses, "I don't know where I am or what I'm after; I'm stuck here again back on Memory Lane."

The word "pain" turns up in two songs, yet there is an overriding joyousness hovering over it all: the jubilant gospel-esque sing-along/clap-along of "The Pen is Mightier Than the Sword;" the softly swinging soul of "Share Your Love With Me," the album's lone cover, originally performed by blues titan Bobby "Blue" Bland. The self-produced *Keep Me Singing* is straight-ahead Van, who delivers a lyric in that voice that could be no other's. The album is devoid of the ethereality that has often marked his work, free of the stream-of-consciousness vocal ramblings. Here, Morrison presents 13 structured tunes, melodies so warm and comforting you'll want to wear them as a winter coat. Ballads rule—populated with strings and bold, sweeping piano lines, sweet acoustic guitars, tasteful but serious electrics, rousing background vocals and, of course, soul. With Van Morrison, there is always the soul.

"Let It Rhyme," the opening track, is an unabashed love song that would have been at home on *Moondance* (albeit its melody is a dead ringer for the Stones' "Waiting on a Friend"). That track's easy-going demeanor is echoed often, in "Going Down to Bangor," a blues-saturated paean to Belfast that recalls vintage Paul Butterfield (harp: Van), and "In Tiburon," a love song to Morrison's one-time home, the San Francisco Bay Area, stuffed with name-checks of the people (Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Chet Baker, Lenny Bruce) and places (City Lights Books, Sausalito) that made it special for him.

There's a loose-limbed album-closing instrumental and even, by gosh, a bona fide, wannabe hit single as accessible as "Brown Eyed Girl" (if people like Van Morrison could still have hit singles): "Too Late," in which he actually sings "Whoops, I beg your pardon." Hey, it's OK, really. Any time.

Jeff Tamarkin

Aaron Neville

Apache TELL IT

Arriving three years after his sole album for Blue Note, a tribute to vintage doo-wop music, **Aaron Neville** does a complete 180 with *Apache*, a self-released set of all-original tunes, mostly written with producer **Eric Krasno** and his partner, **Dave Gutter.** Neville has never been afraid to try new things, but *Apache*, which also comes a half-century after his breakthrough single, "Tell It Like It Is," often feels like a deliberate departure. It's a decidedly modern-sounding recording, Krasno matching the New Orleans icon's instantly recognizable pipes with chunkier beats and tougher accompaniments. With a few exceptions, particularly "Stompin' Ground," a paean to his Big Easy upbringing, there's less reliance than usual on that city's familiar rhythms; instead, the new songs place Neville in more conventional soul settings. "Make Your Momma Cry" and "Orchid in the Storm" could just as easily have come out of Philadelphia in the early '70s, while opener "Be Your Man" bears the grit of a Muscle Shoals session. The quasi-spoken-word "Fragile World" could have been an outtake from Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*. Still, when Neville attaches that voice to a ballad, like this album's falsetto-fueled "Heaven," it could be from anywhere and any time, but no way could it be coming from anybody else. *Jeff Tamarkin*

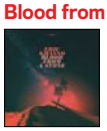
Local Natives

Sunlit Youth LOMA VISTA

Across six years and three LPs, **Local Natives** have evolved from Technicolor indie-rock (2010's *Gorilla Manor*) to majestic, major-league alt-rock (2013's *Hummingbird*) to the sleek electro-rock of *Sunlit Youth*, which aims for the arena grandeur of U2 and Coldplay. With their angelic vocal harmonies and soul-baring lyrics, the LA quintet has always felt predestined for a broader stage—but, here, the transition often feels awkward. "Heard they're still playing songs on the radio," they note amid the shimmering synths of "Masters," almost alluding to their mainstream makeover. "Villainy" layers reverb-coated chants over programmed drums and a rote synth loop that wouldn't disrupt a Katy Perry record; the band reaches peak "Viva la Vida" with "Past Lives," a tear-jerking avalanche of drums and keys. "I will wait for you/ At the end, love," **Taylor Rice** croons—pure catharsis nearly buried by the song's Windex-ed production. Moments of organic, breezy bliss are littered throughout *Sunlit Youth*—the soft-rock groove of "Dark Days," the underwater dub textures of "Jellyfish." But you have to squint to find them beneath the blinding gloss. *Ryan Reed*

Eric Krasno

Blood from a Stone FEEL



Blood from a Stone opens with the quick fade-in of "Waiting on Your Love," and wastes no time in answering the biggest question surrounding its release. Yes, Soulive/Lettuce co-founder **Eric Krasno** is an entertaining and proficient singer. So why did it take him this long to start? The highly esteemed guitarist has lent his production and songwriting expertise to multiple Grammy winners, spent a summer as the substitute bass player for Tedeschi Trucks Band and added his lean and tasteful axe prowess to a diverse mix of recordings. Now, after two decades as the ultimate team player, Krasno makes his conspicuous debut at the microphone. Vocally, he's in roughly the same neighborhood as Jimi Hendrix or Lenny Kravitz, with a baseline of the blues that expands in starbursts of gritty soul and steady funk. Whether yielding to guest **Alecia Chakour**'s charms ("Wicked This Way") or countered by the high-harmony honey of co-producer **Jeremy Most** ("On the Rise"), Krasno seems comfortable as a frontman. Musically, he bridges the sounds of yesterday and tomorrow deftly; his vintage gear blends with modern synths and samples. Of course, there is plenty of joyous and exuberant guitar on every cut, peaking when **Derek Trucks** joins him for a superpower summit on "Curse Lifter," the record's lone instrumental. An extra long fade-out closes the finale, "When the Day Comes," with Krasno flowing into infinite space as the sorrow sinks in; he'll keep on playing, but it's time for us to go. *Larson Sutton*

Michael Franti & Spearhead

Soulrocker FANTASY

Michael Franti continues his musical explorations by incorporating elements of modern electronica into his ever-evolving sound. Still a firm believer in the power of music to change the world for the better, his lyrics remain sharp, able to move your spirit as they motivate you to get up and dance. Jamaican producers **Stephen "Di Genius" McGregor** and **Dwayne "Supa Dups" Chin-Quee** helped shape the sound of the album, and the ska and reggae tracks they worked on are some of the album's strongest. Franti reminds us that we're all mortal on "Once a Day," but mostly, this upbeat ska tune urges us to celebrate every moment of our lives. "My Favorite Wine Is Tequila" is a delirious love song with a smoky reggae pulse that suggests UB40's arrangement of "Red Red Wine." There's a nod to the simple, driving synth sound of Kraftwerk on "Get Myself to Saturday." "Good to Be Alive Today" shows Franti's ability to seamlessly combine rap, soul and pop into a smooth, uplifting confection. Franti's vocals alternate between a melodic rap and an expressive croon that suggests Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" with a message of spiritual and political harmony that doesn't ignore the problems that confront us every day. "My Lord" is a blend of thumping dancehall percussion, acoustic guitar and synthesizers playing fills that sound like drunken kazoos. *J. Poet*

Amos Lee

Spirit JOHN VARVATOS/REPUBLIC

Amos Lee has explained that he wrote the title track for his newest release after being moved by a New Orleans street singer he encountered. The singer, who had been performing to no one in particular, had a deep connection with his music and passed it on to his one-man audience. *Spirit* exudes that feeling of connection. It's not that Lee ever veered too far from the sort of honest, intimate songwriting that marked his earliest work, but perhaps he needed a bit of a reboot. These songs are raw and open; they touch a nerve. There's a fervor to the performances, a realism in the stories. "Vaporize," one of the first tracks released from the record, is enveloping, its soul/gospel buoyancy anathema to the heartbreak expressed: "I can't seem to find a little piece of mind," Lee sings. "I guess I'll just vaporize everything that's inside." More expansive production—stacked vocals, Lee and **Luther Dickinson**'s Southern-fried guitar, keyboard colorings—dominates "Highways and Clouds," but what might be just a road song in other hands becomes a voyage into the unknown in Lee's. But sometimes it's all just alright: "Oh, I'll sing for you/ What more can I do/ Oh, I'll sing for you," Lee offers in the mostly acoustic "One Lonely Night," and you're more than happy to take him up on his offer. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Billy Bragg &Joe Henry

The Motet

Totem SELF-RELEASED

The Motet, like all great practitioners of funk, is cerebral on the sly. As the title of the Colorado band's eighth album, *Totem* is both anagram and emblem; emerging from a personnel reshuffle that introduces the hot-coals soul of new singer **Lyle Divinsky**, as the band stacks its influences into a tower of power. Regional dialects—as diverse as the Bay Area retro-burst on the opening "The Truth" or the NYC roller-rink disco of "Fool No More," to the Crescent City sound of "Know It Too Well" and the Kingston one-drop "Contraband"—connect through staccato stabs of bayonet-sharp brass and bedrock bass and drums. The 12-track set, written collectively by the seven-piece ensemble, loosens as it tightens. Unbridled sax improvisation finds room to run within lockstep arrangements. Electronica mingles with mirror-ball R&B. Percussive Latin bumps hips with Motor City slinks. Carving out space with precision and parity for all is producer **Eric Krasno**, who allows each cut to spotlight the individual as brightly as the group. For his part, Divinsky is a terrific fit, complementing the grooves laid down by bandleader/drummer **Dave Watts** with passionate cool. Here's hoping, for a band that has undergone several lineup changes in its relatively short history, that *Totem* stands as a symbolic pillar of the Motet tribe as one united, strong and forever funky. *Larson Sutton*

Billy Bragg & Joe Henry

Shine a Light: Field Recordings from the Great American Railroad

COOKING VINYL

It's been a long time since the railroad—and songs about trains—played a significant role in American life. These days, most of us who board a train at all usually do so as commuters, surrounded by other tired and miserable people with heads buried in electronic devices, not paying any attention to whatever rolls by outside. But **Billy Bragg**, the English singer-songwriter, and his American counterpart **Joe Henry** love the railroading song tradition and accordingly set out to honor it in the best possible way. They boarded a cross-country train and recorded train-related songs at various stations along the way. Most of these will be familiar to anyone with a working knowledge of folk music: Jimmie Rodgers' "Waiting for a Train," Lead Belly's "Midnight Special," John Hartford's "Gentle on My Mind" and numerous traditional tunes. The arrangements are necessarily simple: two voices in harmony and a couple of guitars, stories being told. Sometimes you can hear the hum of the hubbub as the two take up another tune, another homage. The glory days of railroading may be behind us, but these songs will always serve to remind. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Allen Toussaint

American Tunes NONESUCH

The late **Allen Toussaint** was a musical giant—a songwriter, producer, arranger, pianist and singer without equal. He brought the sound of New Orleans to the world with records like Benny Spellman's "Fortune Teller" and Ernie K-Doe's "Mother-in-Law," adding a second-Line syncopation to the foundation of rock-and-roll. His piano playing is at the heart of his final album, *American Tunes*, and, as usual, he's full of unexpected twists and surprising flourishes. Toussaint adds a gentle swing to Fats Waller's "Viper's Drag," with a hint of reggae in his left hand as he drops quotes from "St. Louis Blues" and Grieg's "Hall of the Mountain King" into his arrangement. He slows down the Professor Longhair standard "Big Chief," sprinkling it with sparkling arpeggios that suggest Bach on a Bourbon Street bender. Drummer **Jay Bellerose** and bassist **David Piltch** contribute a Latin pulse to Bill Evans'

"Waltz for Debby." Toussaint takes it at a measured tempo, his right hand trills ornamenting the melody. **Rhiannon Giddens** contributes vocals to Duke Ellington's bluesy "Rocks in My Bed" and "Come Sunday." On the latter, Toussaint supports her powerful, sanctified vocal with subtle bass notes from his left hand. The album closes with Paul Simon's "American Tune," featuring Toussaint's sole vocal performance. His weary tones are supported by his own piano and **Bill Frisell**'s pensive guitar. He brings an aching melancholy to the lyric, and when he sings, "I'm trying to get some rest," it's hard to avoid thinking of the long sleep he was so close to. ***J. Poet***

Phantogram

Three REPUBLIC

With their 2010 debut, *Eyelid Movies*, New York duo **Phantogram** created a dirty, late-night groove that echoed Portishead's far-off trip-hop. But on their follow-up, *Voices*, Phantogram expanded their pop sound and lost a bit of grit. Now, after a high-profile collaboration with Outkast's Big Boi (together known as Big Grams), the act returns with *Three*, a record that expertly balances the explosive energy of modern pop with the grime and twitch of their early work. First single "You Don't Get Me High Anymore" blasts out of the gate with a jump-rope rhythm shot through by an imposing synthesizer melody. While **Sarah Barthel** and **Josh Carter** trade vocals on many of these songs, only the former makes the lyrics sting; Barthel's pleading, "Nothing is fun, not like before... Used to take one, now it takes four" is the track's sinister chorus, delivered with a no-one-gets-out-alive grin. The pounding "Destroyer" marches forward like soldiers on the attack; "Cruel World" lurches with a heavy, hip-hop lean. And lines like, "No one's gonna touch you, no one's gonna look at you the way that I do," from the strobe-lit, spring-loaded "You're Mine," will squirm in your head for days. The third time out, Phantogram nails it. ***Justin Jacobs***

Dinosaur Jr.

Give a Glimpse of What Yer Not

JAGJAGUWAR

Give a Glimpse of What Yer Not is the 11th full-length album from **Dinosaur Jr.** since their formation in 1984, and it reveals the results of both an evolution and a resolute consistency. Since the group's 1985 debut, *Dinosaur*, **J Mascis** and company have created American rock songs that equally emphasize fluid melodies and raw distortion. This album, like the band's past three releases since their reformation in 2005, reveals practiced songwriting that is wholly confident in its delivery. The musicians here are so good at their instruments and Mascis has honed his lyrics so perfectly that there is space for exploration without getting too sidetracked from Dinosaur Jr.'s signature rock style. Crooner "Be a Part" rambles through its folksy, twanging melody without ever feeling lost while "I Walk for Miles" sends surging guitar riffs driving under Mascis' voice, giving it a sludge-metal tinge. The album deepens the level of trust between Dinosaur Jr. and their fans, offering a reminder that the alt-rock pioneers generally fail to disappoint. The album concludes with "Left/Right," a soulful number on which Mascis poignantly asserts, "My fate is my fate/ I'll lie back and wait." It's like he knows something the rest of us don't, and music is the best way of trying to explain it. ***Emily Zemler***

Mudcrutch

2 REPRISE

Although **Mudcrutch** rarely recorded prior to **Tom Petty**'s move from Gainesville, Fla., to the wider world at large, his first group gave him and his Heartbreakers the experience and encouragement needed to scale that higher plateau. Their 2008 one-off reunion has become an ongoing project, giving the band credence and newfound recognition. Still, there's little difference between today's Heartbreakers and Mudcrutch's current incarnation, since Petty and bandmates **Benmont Tench** and **Mike Campbell** play alongside fellow original members **Tom Leadon** and **Randall Marsh**. Given that fact, and their shared history, it's little wonder then that the two bands possess similar styles. "Dreams of Flying," "Hope," "Victim of Circumstance" and "Beautiful World" are sprawling, certifiable rockers that would find appropriate places in the Heartbreakers' repertoire, while the hazy ballad "Beautiful Blue" might fit nicely on any one of Petty's solo excursions. Notably, though, Mudcrutch offers an example of democracy in action, suggesting that Petty's role is no more central to their efforts than the others'. Although Petty sings lead on the majority of the songs, he also cedes the spotlight to Leadon, Marsh, Tench and Campbell on their own compositions. Likewise, opening track "Trailer," the rowdy "Welcome to Hell" and the banjo-strummed "The Other Side of the Mountain" lean toward a more down-home mood. A fine follow-up, *Mudcrutch 2* may give the Heartbreakers unintended competition. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Ear Crystals BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

Rio de Janeiro goddamn.

The year's best Brazilian album finds 79-year-old samba queen **Elza Soares** singing from personal experience about the third-class status of black women in Brazil. *Woman at the End of the World* (Mais Um Discos) is a singular and often abrasively seductive collection of songs concerning sex, blackness, domestic abuse, and other everyday joys and tragedies. Like a South American Nina Simone, Soares has seen it all, and sounds like it. Her husky, sensuous voice, along with some relatively outside arrangements with Afrobeat group **Bixiga 7**, makes for a timely wake-up call, and the result is the rare truly experimental album by a septuagenarian of any gender.

Alive album.

If the **David Harrington Group**'s dark instrumental album *Become Alive* (Other People) suggests anything concrete, then it's the sheer *difficulty* of becoming alive. Nicolas Jaar's former Darkside collaborator plots a trajectory somewhere between electric Miles Davis and the cosmic loneliness of Pink Floyd, transforming studio improvisations and loose compositions into slowly unfolding atmospheres through the liberal application of post-production effects. Timbres and tempos gradually coalesce throughout the course of the album; Harrington doesn't play a real guitar solo until two-thirds of the way in. But it all pays off in closer "All I Can Do," a pretty epic Sergio Leone-esque composition full of optimistic charm.

Dream on.

By titling her latest album *Dream Girl*, **Ann Magnuson**'s just telling it like it is. As demonstrated by unspeakably brilliant Bongwater albums like *Double Bummer* and *The Power of Pussy*, this Hollywood hyphenate excels in transforming her oneiric activities into art—hence the extended reveries "Be a Satyr" (an ultimately unsexy sex fantasy) and "Ayahuasca: The Movie" (more like "Ayahuasca: The Endorsement"). The actual songs include the charming "Cat in the Sun" ("not to be confused with a band on the run") and sweet covers of Heart's "Dreamboat Annie" (duh) and Glen Campbell's 1968 hit, "Dreams of the Everyday Housewife."

Not your man.

Serge Gainsbourg's louche lips meet Leonard Cohen's kinky koans in **Warhaus**' *We Fucked a Flame Into Being* (Play It Again Sam), the delightfully decadent solo debut of Belgian singer **Maarten Devoldere**. The finger-snapping, France-'69 arrangements sound snazzy and super-fresh; Devoldere's lyrics contain delightfully droll reflections on life in the trash lane ("Loving you isn't easy, you know/ But it's a motherfucker not to do so"); "Time and Again" contains the grooviest backing chorus you'll hear this side of "Walk on the Wild Side," and "I'm Not Him" measures out its girl praises with stopwatch precision.

Slavs of New York.

In 1963, the U.S. State Department sponsored a Duke Ellington Orchestra tour across the Middle East and South Asia. Cut short by Kennedy's assassination, the tour inspired Ellington and Billy Strayhorn to write their last great (if misnamed) album. And with *Slavic Soul Party! Plays Duke Ellington's Far East Suite* (Ropeadope), Brooklyn's mighty **Slavic Soul Party!** bring it all back home to Eastern Europe, transforming feisty and sacred melodies into glorious Balkanized dance music with the help of some of New York's best players. One highlight is clarinetist **Peter Hess**' interpretation of Jimmy Hamilton's extended "Ad Lib on Nippon" solo during a Bulgarian wedding romp.

The Felice Brothers

Life in the Dark YEP ROC

It's frequently a nice surprise when a singer's voice comes off as a bit mismatched with the genre in which it's been placed, but there's something to be said for a voice that just perfectly embodies the ethos of their music. **Ian Felice**'s crackling timbre definitely falls into the latter category, and to great effect. **The Felice Brothers**, which features his actual brother **James** on accordion and keys, return with *Life in the Dark*, another collection of folk both earnest and tongue-in-cheek. The album leads off with the fun wordplay of "Aerosol Ball" before delving into the downtrodden waltz of "Jack at the Asylum." The thoughtfully plucked electric guitar in "Triumph '73" immediately gets its counterpoint in the following track, "Plunder," whose distorted riffs and unfortunate anecdotes illustrate the album's comfortingly loose production, while highlighting Ian Felice's penchant for Guthrie and Dylan-esque lyrics like: "They say that only 80 men/ own more than half the world/ I had a dream they spread it around/ I ended up in the mental ward." "Sally!" is a hoedown of an interlude that splits the album in half, time-wise, and makes way for the traditional ballad quality of "Diamond Bell," which features an engaging, cascading interplay of accordion and fiddle. "Sell the House," the album's encore, rounds out the record in satisfying, sing-along style. ***Matt Inman***

Future Rock

Long Ago 1320

After over a decade on the jamtronica circuit, **Future Rock** are well established as purveyors of chunky, danceable electro-rock, yet they now find themselves suspended between time periods. *Long Ago*, a self-admitted intentional juxtaposition with the band's name, finds the Midwest group looking back to the past for new inspiration in classic songwriting. Much of *Long Ago* hits that mark, due in part to the trio's collaboration with singer-songwriter **Anna Soltys**, who lends her malleable vocals to four of the seven tracks on the album, including opening cut "Take It Back," which pairs pulsing, liquid keyboards with Soltys' well-crafted, smoky melody. The title track follows with a downshift in gear that explores Future Rock's ability to craft a sustainable groove and texture, and proves to be one of the highlights of the concise album. "Pathfinder" kicks the energy back up with a more expected instrumental cut that steadily builds to the most frenzied climax on the record. While the non-vocal songs serve to reaffirm Future Rock's ability to, well, rock, with a well-honed attack and cohesiveness, the inclusion of Soltys' voice and melody—which return on the dancefloor-ready "Go With It" and album closer "A Better Way"—sets off the whole endeavor in a welcome way, blending her lilting, varied style with the trio's hardline, unrelenting approach. ***Matt Inman***

Blind Pilot

And Then Like Lions ATO

Portland, Ore.–based folk act **Blind Pilot** first made ripples back in 2008 by touring the West Coast on bicycles. Though the band's personnel has grown since then, their third album, *And Then Like Lions*, holds on to that casual, stripped-down vibe. To call this campfire folk, though, would sell it short—these 10 tracks are immaculately assembled and produced with gorgeous depth and dynamics by **Tucker Martine** (The Decemberists, My Morning Jacket). Frontman **Israel Nebeker** wrote the set over three years, musically purging the death of his father and the dissolution of a long relationship. But *And Then Like Lions* isn't a devastating record; it's a human one. Nebeker delivers clever lines like, "I started working as a tour guide. I thought it would make me believe my own words," from the buoyant "Packed Powder," with live conviction, as if he's written the song on the spot and he wants to see where it'll take him. Nebeker's knack for simple melodies anchors most songs with one that's at least pretty, and sometimes impossible not to hum. Throw in soft snare rolls, twinkling guitar lines and trumpets for texture, and you've got a little gem of a folk record. *Justin Jacobs*

Assembly of Dust

Tales from the Oregon Trail

SELF-RELEASED

Tales from the Oregon Trail finds **Assembly of Dust** operating in their natural environs, live in concert, and furthering their reputation as populist jam-folk heroes. Recorded in Portland, Ore., in December 2014, it finds them purveying the unassuming affability that marks songs such as "Second Song," "Mama" and "Filter," along with their extended instrumental outlays of an Allmans-like variety on "All That I Am Now" and "Stone Choir." It's the same MO the band has pursued for the past 14 years, a spontaneous setup that leaves plenty of room for lead guitarist **Adam Terrell** and keyboard player/violinist **Jason Crosby** to stretch out with their soloing. Likewise, **Reid Genauer**'s agreeable vocals and the rhythm section of drummer **Dave Diamond** and bassist **John Leccesse** provide the essential foundation. Their improvisational abilities and melodic sensibilities have been honed on the festival circuit, but their jamband ethos is also tempered by an easy, unhurried delivery that makes a cover choice like Neil Young's "Comes a Time" a natural fit with set closer "Crest of My Wing." While early comparisons to The Band, Traffic and the Dead still ring true—the latter due to Genauer's vocal kinship with Jerry and AOD's penchant for effusive jams—the new album also feels in line with contemporary cosmic-Americana groups like Wilco and My Morning Jacket. As a result, these *Tales* find their ideal fit with the title's well-travelled Trail—crafty, creative and brimming with celebration, revelry, blithe country comforts and astute invention. *Lee Zimmerman*

Assembly of Dust

Charlie Hunter

Everybody Has a Plan Until They Get Punched in the Mouth

GROUNDUP/DECCA

Besides having some of the best album titles ever (*Gentlemen, I Neglected to Inform You You Will Not Be Getting Paid* is another), **Charlie Hunter** happens to be one hell of a jazz guitar player, songwriter and bandleader. *Everybody Has a Plan...* is his 19th album and one of his most potent. Over 10 mostly original tracks, Hunter, who handles bass duties on his seven-string axe, and his superlative accompanists—drummer **Bobby Previte**, trombonist **Curtis Fowlkes** and cornetist **Kirk Knuffke**—focus primarily on variations on the blues and soul, albeit with greater imagination and improvisational acumen than most. The title track is languorous and airy, as Previte keeps the beat loose and limber while the rest tiptoe around one another until, toward the end, Fowlkes steps out, lobbing cornet punctuations at them at regular intervals. "We Don't Want Nobody Nobody Sent" is as intriguing and mysterious as its title, striding along casually but determinedly, while "The Guys. Get. Shirts" is The Mar-Keys transplanted to NOLA by way of an alternate universe. Throughout, Hunter's guitar lines are crisp, devoid of fat and unpredictable, and the band is never less than inventive and crafty. *Jeff Tamarkin*

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JOE RUSSO'S ALMOST DEAD • LOTUS • LETTUCE • SHPONGLE (Simon Posford DJ Set) • THE FLOOZIES
GOLDROOM • MICHAL MENERT • MANIC FOCUS (DJ Set) • DEITCH (DJ Set)
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WOMEN WHO ROCK!

1 Grace Potter

"Instigators"
From the album *Midnight*
Hollywood Records, Inc.

In 2015, Grace released her critically acclaimed solo album, *Midnight* , to a #17 debut on the Billboard 200 chart. Midnight was recorded and mixed at Barefoot Studios in Hollywood, CA, with producer Eric Valentine. The core studio band consisted of Potter and Valentine on most of the instruments, with Matt Burr on drums and percussion. Additional contributions came from guitarists Scott Tournet and Benny Yurco and bassist Michael Libramento, as well as former tourmates and friends singer-songwriter Rayland Baxter, Audra Mae, Noelle Skaggs of Fitz & the Tantrums, and Nick Oliveri of Queens of the Stone Age.

www.gracepotter.com

2 The Copper Tones

"Practice What You Preach"
From the album *The Copper Tones*
Self-Released

The Copper Tones were formed in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. Their unique sound has been dubbed "Soulgrass." In March of 2016, they released their debut album. The Copper Tones are performing at venues from Key West up to Jacksonville, and now branching outside of Florida. Made up of four multi-instrumentalists, their live show is not to be missed.

www.thecoppertonesmusic.com

3 She Returns From War

"Oh, What a Love"
From the album *Oh, What A Love*
10 Foot Woody Records

She Returns From War's *Oh What a Love* expands sonically from previous releases to realize a cinematic Americana sound with just a dash of psychedelic thrill. The rich lyrical content gives a strong foundation for the album to explore unsuspected realms of sound with a humble and relatable ease.

www.shereturnsfromwar.bandcamp.com

4 Silversnake Michelle

"Drops of Time"
From the album *Her Snakeness*
Self-Released

Micaela Battista, alias Silversnake Michelle, was born in Turin, Italy in 1975. In 1991, she started studying acting. In 2013, her alter ego Silversnake Michelle was born, a symbol of rebirth. In 2014, she released her first album *So in My Mind*... and in October 2014, she was selected and performed in a TV program in the U.S., *Live From Center Stage*. In 2016, she releases the new concept album *Her Snakeness*.

www.silversnakemichelle.bandcamp.com

5 Anna Rose

"Bury Me Deep"
From the EP *Strays in the Cut*
White Pony LLC

Anna Rose sums *Strays in the Cut* into one crisp breath—bravery. The six-track EP is a defiant revolution that pushes both personal and musical boundaries. "I am very much an album artist and a storyteller," said Rose. Sentiment and conviction fountain from *Strays in the Cut* while embracing electronic elements like omnichord, edgy guitar and Rose's powerhouse vocals. Stripped of its fat and fluff, tracks like "Bury Me Deep" coarse through your veins with rock energy. "Start a War" is equally mesmerizing. The intro conjures a calming effect, soothing the ear in the wake of its storm. Rose's tone lures listeners into the depths of *Strays in the Cut*. "I'm trying to remember where I am at the heart of it. I'm a songwriter. I'm emotional... but if you're always fighting for what you believe in, that is all that matters," said Rose. "This is who I am."

www.annarosemusic.com

6 The Garcia Project

"Lonesome and a Long Way From Home"
From the album *Live at Sweetwater Music Hall*
Self-Released

The Garcia Project's performances are recreations of full, classic Jerry Garcia Band setlists from 1975-1995. With thoughtful arrangements and the proper instrumentation and feel, The Garcia Project faithfully channels and projects the feelings, emotions and music that propelled the Jerry Garcia Band and their fans through the years.

www.thegarciaproject.com

7 NATE

"Little Sad Men"
From the album *Pilgrim*
Self-released

Having overcome an accident, singer-songwriter Nathalie Blomme (NATE) dedicates her new life in a wheelchair to her love for singing, writing, composing and filmmaking, surrounded by musicians such as Jan Oelbrandt, Nik Phelps (recordings with Tom Waits, live-sessions with Tony Bennett and Frank Zappa), Nicolas Galliano, Cédric Laronche and Samuel Lévy.

www.bloomnotes.net

8 Brittany Ellis

"Scorpio"
From the album *Horoscope*
Self-Released

Straight from the zodiac map is Brittany Ellis with her new album, *Horoscope*. "Scorpio" intensifies with an album montage, emphasizing the conceptual tone. It is the first of many collaborations with Travis Ellis, her brother and an EDM producer. Releasing this month: the ethereal "Scorpio" music video directed by Justin Suttles.

www.brittanyellismusic.com

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9 Kris Angelis

"Heartbreak Is Contagious"
From the EP *Heartbreak Is Contagious*
Self-Released

Kris Angelis grew up on a farm, writing songs with her twin sister in their treehouse. She's played SXSW, Edinburgh Fringe, Sundance, NAMM, and MondoNYC. Kris's indie-pop EP "Heartbreak Is Contagious" showcases her unique, powerful voice and takes the listener on an exploration of the spectrum of love. It was awarded Best Female EP in the 2016 LA Music Critic's Awards.

www.krisangelis.com

10 Waterfall Wash

"Married to the Sound"
From the album *Married to the Sound*
Self-released

This Nashville math pop five-piece is a quirky mesh of rock and pop punk with inclinations toward the lofi/ambient spectrum. Auxiliary instrumentalist Ellice Evins adds a spectrum of sound, from subtle yet sweeping autoharp to playful glockenspiel and lush synth textures.

www.waterfallwash.com

11 Editor's Pick: Bonnie Raitt

"The Comin' Round Is Going Through"
From the album *Dig in Deep*
Redwing Records

Bonnie Raitt will tour the U.S. this fall playing music from her 20th album, *Dig in Deep*, released in February 2016 on her independent label, Redwing Records. The new record illustrates the delicate balance of consistency and risk-taking that has defined Raitt's remarkable career for more than 45 years.

www.bonnieraitt.com

12 JamOFF! Winner: Jackie Venson

"Lost in Time" (Live)
From the live album *Jackie Venson*
Self-Released

Enthralled with music since the age of eight, Jackie Venson has studied piano for 18 years as well as singing, songwriting and five years of intensive guitar study, in addition to composition and studio production at Berklee College of Music. Venson's accomplished background and natural knack for songwriting caught the attention of producer Eddy Hobizal, who, along with fellow seasoned, lifelong musicians, completed the vision of Venson's self-titled project.

www.jackievenson.com

John Doe
The Westerner
COOL ROCK/THIRTY TIGERS

John Doe seems to inhabit the netherworld between aging punk rocker and seasoned, world-weary bluesman. The X frontman has found solid ground delivering his unique brand of twangy country-blues and ballads laced with punk attitude. With *The Westerner*, Doe makes it clear you either "get on board" with his solo work or don't, as the growling opening stanza declares: "You gotta get on board this train." There's no reason to step off this rollicking ride that finds Doe further expanding his musical reach, tapping into spaghetti-western psychedelia, languid ballads, mystic twang and a few requisite cowpunk stomps reminiscent of his other band. Teaming with **Debbie Harry** (Blondie), "Go Baby Go" conjures up the vintage X songbook—stinging guitars and slap-beat—yet Harry's jazzy vocal range far exceeds Exene Cervenka's, adding a sweet counterpoint to the gritty track. "Drink of Water," similarly, finds Doe reveling in youthful exuberance. At the other end of the spectrum, "Alone in Arizona" captures Doe's longing with an expansive desert vibe and heat-stroke-inducing effects, while "Sunlight" is a raw, stripped-down acoustic affair. *The Westerner* shows Doe's continued songwriting growth and confidence with a balanced approach, acknowledging the past while pushing toward the future.
Glenn BurnSilver

Hot Buttered Rum
The Kite & The Key SELF-RELEASED

Hot Buttered Rum has accumulated a substantial festival following over the course of their career, courtesy of a traditional bluegrass sound filtered through a improvisational approach. As its title suggests, *The Kite & The Key* effectively sums up their style, in the form of three EPs now combined into a single 19-song album. Two sets of original material (penned by the band's **Erik Yates** and **Nat Keefe**, respectively) bookend six archival covers made famous by Ralph Stanley, allowing the band to romp, stomp and extend the vibe though some easy, breezy picking and decidedly good-time grooves. Each EP finds a different producer at the helm—Railroad Earth's **Tim Carbone**, session specialist **Sally Van Meter** and String Cheese Incident's **Kyle Hollingsworth**—but the archival feel stays consistent throughout. Occasionally weary (the tattered "I Wanna Know" and "First Rodeo") but mostly rambling (the telling "Music's Been Good to Me," the rousing "So Much" and "You Be the Fiddle"), the music coasts along on a pluck and a strum, dismissing any concessions to modern accoutrements other than a typical stringed setup. Granted, nothing here really pushes the parameters, but this Rum's satisfying all the same. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Mumford & Sons with Baaba Maal, The Very Best & Beatenberg
Johannesburg GLASSNOTE

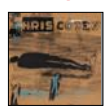
At first, the combination of **Mumford & Sons**' populist appeal and the multi-genre tack taken by Senegalese singer/guitarist **Baaba Maal** might appear to be an unwieldy blend at best. Nevertheless, Mumford's trademark joyful, roots-pop sound is fully fleshed out with the help of Maal's musicians, a scenario that brings to mind Paul Simon's pairing with Ladysmith Black Mambazo and the cultural crossover that Johnny Clegg managed with both of his bands, Juluka and Savuka. Like those earlier examples, any distinction in language, origin or tradition is immediately relegated to the back burner. So while *Johannesburg* may be a compact collection, its five songs boast enough effusive energy and ceaseless celebration to compensate for its brevity. It commences on a solemn note, but soon erupts in an outpouring of shared celebration that finds a unified purpose. "Wona," "Fool You've Landed" and "Ngamila" are contagiously exuberant, all tribal chanting underscored by a distinct spiritual sensibility. While that sense of higher purpose is illuminated to various degrees throughout, it's especially evident in opening and closing tracks "There Will Be Time" and "Si Tu Veux," which find the music cast through an upward gaze of reverence and reflection.
Lee Zimmerman

Hot Buttered Rum

Grouplove
Big Mess CANVASBACK/ATLANTIC

Like Cheap Trick before them, Los Angeles quintet **Grouplove** lead their assault with catchy choruses cranked up, blasting their melodies in your face until you can't help but sing along. The band broke out in 2011 with radio candy like "Tongue Tied" and "Colours." On *Big Mess*, Grouplove fully commit to day-glow power-pop—the percussion pounds and echoes, the keyboards are giant-marshmallow fat and sizzling electronics carbonate each song. But, for any complaints about the album's overproduction (helmed by indie mainstay **Phil Ek** and Grouplove's own **Ryan Rabin**), *Big Mess* is about as fun as pop gets nowadays. When a chorus takes off, it does so in spectacular, fireworks fashion. The rubbery bass of "Do You Love Someone" bubbles and gurgles under singer **Christian Zucconi**'s verses until the whole thing explodes with the fiery guitars of a joyous, hollered chorus. Even when things slow down, Grouplove never really stop buzzing. "Spinning" is all sunshine and beach vibes, lit up with a pulsing chorus melody and singer/keyboardist **Hannah Hooper**'s airy vocals. *Big Mess* isn't life-changing, but it's also not a mess—it's the sound of a young band having fun, and hoping you will, too. ***Justin Jacobs***

Chris Cohen
As If Apart CAPTURED TRACKS



As a member of Deerhoof, **Chris Cohen** staked out such an oddball yet melody-rich approach to the guitar—a true experimentalist in an avant-indie-rock band full of them—that sometimes it was easy to overlook his writing chops. His solo work, beginning with 2012's *Overgrown Path*, peels away the degrees of separation to reveal a singer-songsmith who can channel dreamy art-pop with the deftness of Chris Bell, Todd Rundgren or a young Brian Eno. His singing voice—sedate to the point of being almost hypnotic—even recalls Eno's, but that's where all similarities end. On the surface, *As If Apart* sounds like a bedroom-produced tranche of summery pop made with cheap synths and a psychedelic edge; dig deeper and it turns vivid and cinematic, with songs like "Torrey Pine" and "The Lender" (the latter's bridge a strange echo of Joe Jackson's "Steppin' Out") painting wide swaths of animated color. And, at the core of it, those lovely guitars, whether they're flanged hard in "Drink from a Silver Cup" or stacked from acoustic to electric in "Yesterday's on My Mind," make the digging all the more worthwhile. ***Bill Murphy***

Minor Victories
Minor Victories FAT POSSUM

Minor Victories is a composite side-project group, made up of Mogwai's **Stuart Braithwaite**, Slowdive's **Rachel Goswell**, the Editors' **Justin Lockey** and his brother **James**. There's a layered heft to this music—a lot of steady eighth notes pile up, with hushed, ennui-sapped vocals. The sound is like scrubbed metal, shiny in places, cloudy in others—a surface that's been disturbed. Krautrock beats, insect-buzz basslines and alien/robot synth arpeggiations slam into angsty string sections. One sometimes hears distant ethereal choirs, like fog or smoke filling up the atmospheres of these songs. The guitars are rarely guitar-like. The songs often build up to thick, almost abstract, sonic smears. The vibe is more about blankets of sound that distort and sag under their own weight, as opposed to stripping away bits to reveal a skeleton. But, as the record progresses, other sides emerge. "Scattered Ashes" sounds like a reworking of the Boss' "Dancing in the Dark" done by My Bloody Valentine or The Vaccines. "For You Always" features **Mark Kozelek** of Sun Kil Moon, and it stands out for his distinctive, word-packed stunt-confessional style. "Cogs" sounds like pure shoegaze revival, a style that defines the whole record. ***John Adamian***

Matthew And The Atlas
Temple COMMUNION

Matthew Hegarty, a singer-songwriter who operates under the guise of **Matthew And The Atlas**, has been labeled "the British Bon Iver" by various music scribes in his native England. Iron & Wine and Sufjan Stevens would seem apt comparisons as well, given Hegarty's high, mournful vocals and his ability to convey darkly dramatic sentiments in ways that seem to literally soar. Honesty, emotion and the other usual additives form key elements in Hegarty's MO, but no matter how tempting, his efforts would be shortchanged by labeling him as just another forlorn shoegazer. These songs are both luminous and illuminating, confessional hymns in which Hegarty rips open his soul. The surging upward spiral that cushions "Mirrors" and the implied urgency of songs such as "Temple" and "On a Midnight Street" find desperation and desire meted in equal measure. Atmospherics are a major part of the mix as well, be it in the hushed, haunting treatment accorded "Elijah" or the mellow drift through dire circumstance found in "Gutter Heart" and "Can't You See." Indeed, Hegarty's solitary sound makes an emphatic impression, one that's derived from his uncommonly intense expression. Another album like this and further ascent will be assured.
Lee Zimmerman

Joshua Redman & Brad Mehldau
Nearness NONESUCH

Saxophonist **Joshua Redman** and pianist **Brad Mehldau** have worked sporadically on each other's group projects since the '90s, but *Nearness* is their first duo release. Now, they will need to make a habit of returning to this format often—their chemistry has never been more pronounced. Recorded live during several European engagements, the six tracks—two from Mehldau, one by Redman and the others are covers—display what at times seems to be an effortless commingling of ideas, despite the intricacy inherent in their improvisations. The set opens with "Ornithology," the Charlie Parker standard, Redman setting the tone without

Reviews

ever mimicking Bird's lines and Mehldau playing it low-key. Midway they switch roles, not meeting up on equal turf till the piece is rolling toward its denouement. The mutual respect and awe has already been established, and it never flags. Mehldau, on this two compositions, first "Always August," then "Old West," is more than happy to invite Redman to move the melody elsewhere, and Redman's "Mehlsancholy Mode" slides into a quasi-baroque stateliness that showcases both musicians' gifts. Monk's "In Walked Bud" and Hoagy Carmichael's "The Nearness of You" could have been cakewalks for these two, but they won't have any of that, instead bringing grandeur and sensitivity to their arrangements. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Okkervil River

Away ATO

Okkervil River, the Texas band led by **Will Sheff**, have been the storytelling poet laureates of indie folk for nearly 15 years now—and with each new album, Sheff's musical ambition has grown with his lyrical prowess. *The Silver Gymnasium*, released in 2013, was their most sprawling yet, with grand, almost Springsteen-esque anthems. Three years later, *Away* is a sonic retreat to the early days, with lush, simple arrangements of strummed guitars and flourishes of strings and organs wrapping up hushed folk. It's the first Okkervil River album in years that's truly all about the words, meaning that Sheff's lyrics come front and center, but it also means that melody and drama take a back seat. On albums like *Black Sheep Boy* and *The Stage Names*, the band balanced intricate storytelling with riveting music to astounding effects. Here, though, we've got purely lovely, often gorgeous songs that somehow fall short of captivating listeners. On the swaying "Mary on a Wave," Sheff sings, "I get a little soft shiver in my shoulders because I think there's someone watching. I get a little soft whisper in my ears now, but I guess it's just time passing." Such is *Away*, a gentle, enjoyable breeze that quietly slips away. *Justin Jacobs*

Uri Caine

Calibrated Thickness 816

There's a thrilling sense of abandon and adventure within these 15 tracks from pianist **Uri Caine** and his rhythm section, bassist **Mark Helias** and drummer **Clarence Penn**. At times, the trio seems to be hurtling toward the edge of a cliff without a care in the world as to how that might turn out. Sometimes, they even go over and then—as in those classic cartoons—stall in midair for a split second before scurrying back to safety. The piano trio format by nature allows for daring improvisation at its core, but rarely does so much surprise and unchecked openness enter into the mix. Some of these tracks, all written by Caine, border on giddiness—"Woke Up This Morning" is what you might get if three precocious and preternaturally gifted toddlers were let loose in the studio with instruments, while "Scatterbrain Suite" is all forward motion and dizzy dancing. Not all is wild and crazy though: "Night Wrestler" keeps the edginess in check and swings like mad, and the ballad "Shadow of a Doubt," one of a handful of tracks that features like-minded cornetist **Kirk Knuffke** sitting in, tempers the group's impulse to frolic with regality and decorum. One of the year's best jazz albums, for sure. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Gary Lucas & Jann Klose

Stereopticon

COSMIC TRIGGER/THE ORCHARD

Gary Lucas and **Jann Klose** both bring solid careers in the music industry to the table—to the great benefit of their duo project. Guitarist Lucas has collaborated with both Tim Buckley and Captain Beefheart, released over 25 albums under his own name, and worked on multiple homages to the music of Buckley, including the movie *Greetings from Tim Buckley*, which just so happens to feature Klose as the voice of the film's iconic namesake. The singer has toured extensively both with traveling Broadway productions and as a solo artist. The two combine their ample talents on *Stereopticon*, melding Lucas' masterful acoustic guitar work with Klose's powerful, musical-theater-honed vocals. Songs like "Walking and Talking" and "Let No One Come Between Us" show off Lucas' ability to pair intricate finger-picking with full strumming flourishes, while tunes like album opener "Fair Weather" and "Take Your Medicine" display a choppier, more percussive aspect to his playing, contrasting the polished, languid voice of Klose. The singer, in turn, shows off on tracks like "Nobody's Talking," in which he goes playfully head-to-head with a bubbly soprano saxophone, and the final number, "Overture," which features some Jimmy Page-esque ornate acoustic strumming from Lucas and long, anguished howls from Klose. *Matt Inman*

of Montreal

Innocence Reaches POLYVINYL

"I think that you're great," **Kevin Barnes** croons amid pulsating synths, his voice beckoning from the back of a robot nightclub. "Let's relate." That seemingly tossed-off lyric marks a promising shift toward simplification. While **of Montreal**'s recent work has run a jaw-dropping stylistic gamut from prog to folk-rock to electro-funk, Barnes has often been a killjoy in his own songs, bogging them down with sub-Shakespearean ramblings. ("The mutinous tramp of cold voltage/ Crucifixion is my conduit," he hurled on last year's "Bassem Sabry.") With album 14, *Innocence Reaches*, he favors efficiency over bloat, with a melodic focus and measured words-per-minute pace that he hasn't approached in a decade. Take "My Fair Lady," a psychedelic reverie that ruminates—in concrete language—on the complexities of a past love. "Because you've been so abused, I have to give all the love that was meant for you to some other girl," he sings over a signature, arpeggiated bass gallop, backed by jazz-flute flourishes. Thankfully, his hodgepodge arrangements haven't mellowed, veering from barbed acid-punk ("Gratuitous Abysses") to symphonic electro-pop ("A Sport and a Pastime"). Finally, an of Montreal album that stimulates the heart as much as the brain. *Ryan Reed*

Caveman

Otero War CINEMATIC MUSIC

It ought to be noted that **Caveman**'s approach isn't anywhere near as primitive as their handle might suggest. Over the past five years, the Brooklyn-based band has released two collections of adventurous indie rock that border on a proto-progressive sound. The new album's title doesn't enhance that description, but the music itself speaks volumes. It boasts an infectious enthusiasm that spurs songs such as "Life or Just Living," "All My Life" and "On My Own" on to greater heights. Still, Caveman are truly at their best when they vary the template, as on opening track "Never Going Back," where they start out in a mellower mode before breaking into a wholly assertive romp. This is a band with an abundant reserve of passion and bravado. If, at times, the melodies sound somewhat rote, all it takes is an upsurge in tone and tempo—like the sort found on "Lean on You," "80 West" and "The State of Mind"—to keep the interest intact. Caveman's confidence makes it apparent they're quite comfortable with their blueprint, and their ability to balance both the cerebral and celebratory. Given that effort, it's a fairly good bet that Caveman will continue to evolve. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Will Butler

Friday Night MERGE

As the madcap younger brother behind the bombastic sound of Arcade Fire, **Will Butler** is inclined to take even more liberties with his own music. *Policy*, his spiky 2015 solo debut, stretched from rootsy rock-and-roll to experimental art-pop, with plenty in between to suggest a songwriter of considerable sensitivity ("I came, I saw, I conquered, and I slept like the dead," he sings on "Something's Coming," deconstructing early David Byrne with a quavery voice on jumper cables). *Friday Night* documents one of Butler's Chicago dates from the *Policy* tour, with a backing band—**Julie Shore** and **Sara Dobbs** on synths, and Antibalas' **Miles Arntzen** on drums—that sounds joined at the hip, if not shooting directly from it. The set jumps off with "Encore—Tell Me We're All Right," one of five new songs and almost a dead ringer for a lost Jackson Browne nugget, only saucier. It's a testament to Butler's biting sense of humor and his love of performing; when he's not exhorting comedian **Jo Firestone** to solicit ironic boos from the crowd (to open the punkabilly-esque "You Must Be Kidding"), he's uncorking the steadily building "Madonna Can't Save Me Now," or rocking straight from the headlines with "Public Defender." Raw and unvarnished, Butler brings a crackling energy that's downright contagious. ***Bill Murphy***

Bombino

Azel PARTISAN

The music of **Omar "Bombino" Moctar** is deeply affecting, rich in layered rhythms, vocal accentuations and driving intensity pushing mostly populist lyrics that are sung in his native Tamasheq. While Bombino adheres to the time-honored traditions and general musical identity of the Tuareg, a desert people of the Sahara, he also pushes the edges of that music. Raised on a steady diet of Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix and Santana, as well as native musicians, Bombino's music is frequently referred to as "desert blues," deftly co-joining sounds native to both sides of the Atlantic. Black Keys bluesman Dan Auerbach was enticed enough to produce 2013's *Nomad*. It was Niger-meets-Mississippi with stunning results. *Azel* carries forth those ideas, even as Bombino simultaneously explores new musical pathways while pulling harder at his roots. Blending reggae one-drop riddims with his own blues sensibilities on "Iwaranagh," Bombino introduces the world to "Tuareggae. Numerous cuts start slowly, morphing into hypnotic desert romps. Female vocal shouts adding both tension and release are an important aspect of Tuareg music. Absent from *Nomad*, like a burning desert wind these return, most notably on the intense "Tamiditine Tarhanam." *Azel* marks the continued development of a guitarist bent on moving forward without leaving his musical legacy behind. ***Glenn BurnSilver***

OFF THE TRACKS

Anna Rose

Strays in the Cut WHITE PONY

"I'm gonna be straight with you/ I'm not just anybody," **Anna Rose** sings in the chorus of "Force of Nature," the lead track to her most recent release, *Strays in the Cut*. And even in a short, six-track effort, Rose backs up her boast. After burning things up with some backroom rock-and-roll in the lead track, she cools things down with "Bury Me Deep," an understated tune propelled by Rose's full vocals and a sultry, muted guitar hook, which gives way to a frantic, staccato solo that seeps into the chorus and helps make the song an album highlight. Rose has music in her blood—her father Alan Menken composed the music for some of Disney's most classic films—and it shows on *Strays in the Cut*, whether she's ripping through the country-rock tinged "Under My Skin" or letting it all go down easy in the crooning, Jenny Lewis—esque echoes of "Start a War." ***Matt Inman***

Woodpigeon

TROUBLE

WHERE IT'S AT IS WHERE YOU ARE

TROUBLE, the sixth release from **Woodpigeon**, the nom-de-plume of Canadian musician **Mark Andrew Hamilton**, doesn't come about its name accidentally. Hamilton's career up until this point has had its share of travails, given the fact that his adventures and misadventures once found him ensnared by poverty,

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SEPTEMBER 15-17 @ PINK MOON 8
SEPTEMBER 17 @ THE LOCAL - BOONE, NC
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SEPTEMBER 24 @ THE BOARDROOM - HILTON HEAD, SC
SEPTEMBER 25 @ THE BOARDROOM - HILTON HEAD, SC
OCTOBER 28 @ HE'S NOT HERE - CHAPEL HILL, NC
OCTOBER 29 @ LET'S GET TOGETHER FESTIVAL AND CAMPOUT - SNOW CAMP, NC
OCTOBER 31 @ MILLENNIUM CENTER - WINSTON-SALEM, NC
NOVEMBER 11 @ UGLY DOG PUB - HIGHLANDS, NC
NOBEMBER 12 @ O'MALLEY'S - SYLVA, NC
NOVEMBER 25 AND 26 @ THANKSGATHERING AT THE MILLENNIUM CENTER - WINSTON-SALEM, NC

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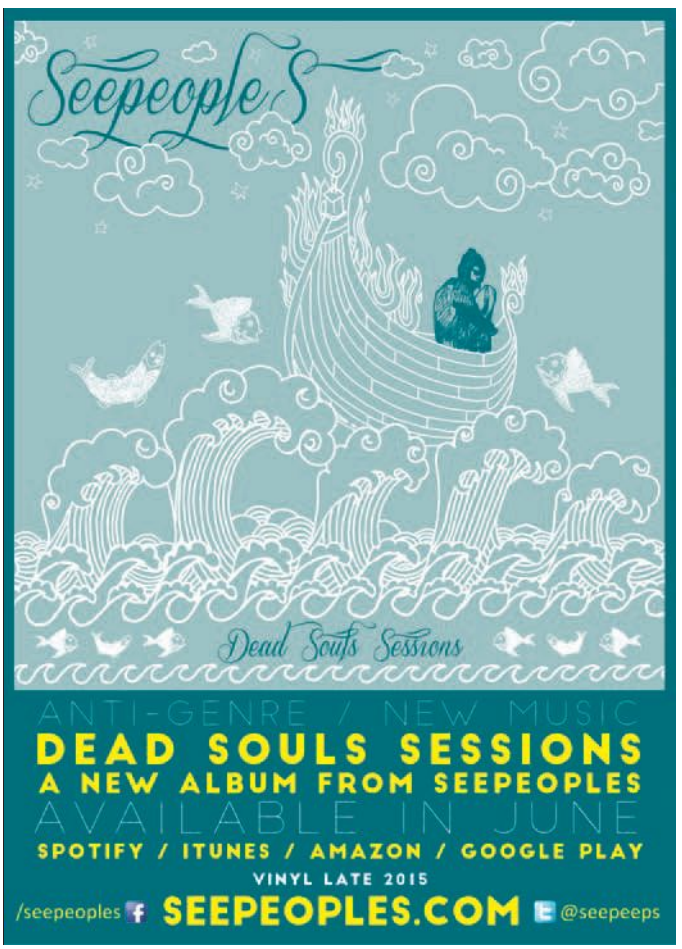

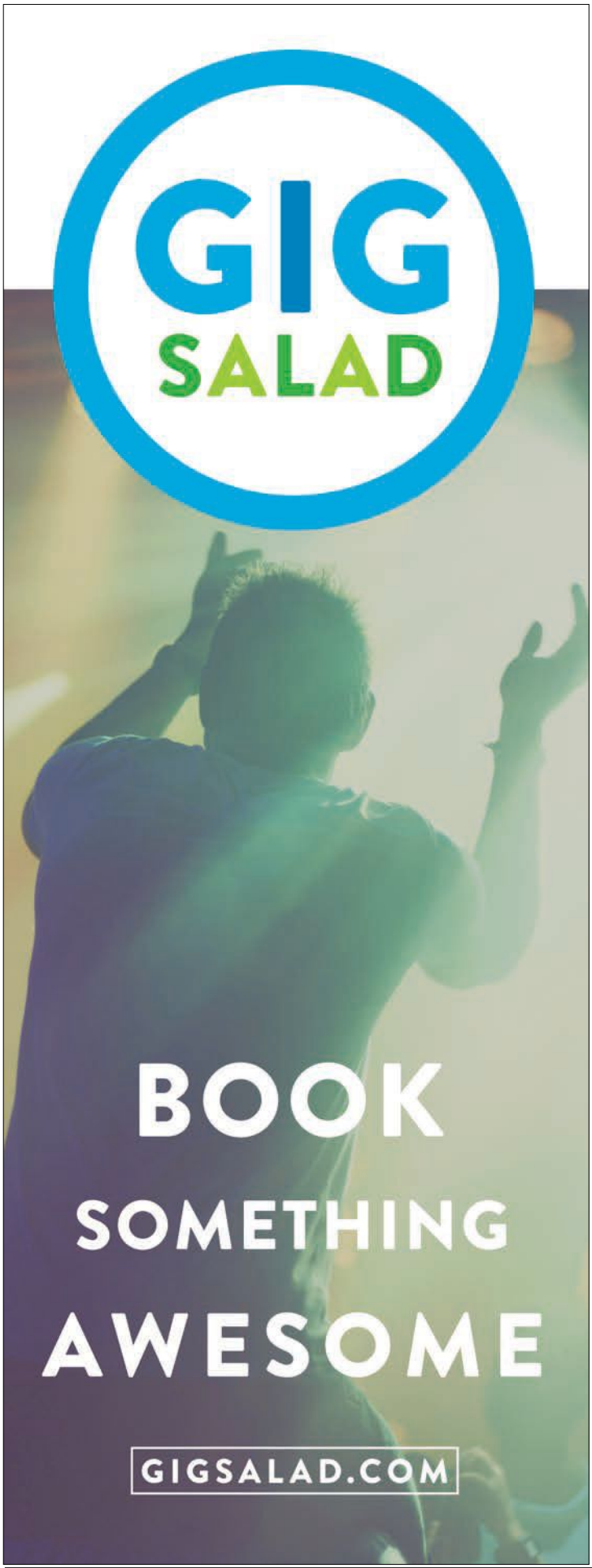

Reviews

struggling with a failed relationship and subsequently free to travel the world. He nearly quit music entirely, but then thought better of it, making *T R O U B L E* a victory of sorts, and far less contentious than its title implies. A combination of ethereal soundscapes and cryptic, hypnotic hooks, its soft, synthesized sound boasts an unusual allure that's as magnetic as it is mesmerizing. Opening track "Fence" sets the tone, its recurring refrain "Don't fence me in" providing the song with its eerie cosmic presence. "Devastating" makes a statement as well, the repeating phrase "That's why we fight" suggesting a meaningful credo that mostly remains elusive. Hamilton's mastery of ambiance is his main strength throughout, imbuing the album with a hushed, spectral feel that underscores its cerebral intent. Even so, the emotional influx is palpable. "It's almost mortifying to be so honest and direct," he's said of these songs. We should feel quite fortunate that he chose to persevere.
Lee Zimmerman

Run River North
Drinking from a Salt Pond
NETTWERK

Run River North's career coalesced two years ago with an eponymous debut that showed great promise, as well as a certain circumspect that proved as idyllic and euphoric as their picturesque handle implied. Two years later, they've curtailed that autumnal sound, substituting it with a modern-pop pastiche instead—one that has them opting for a more considered approach, complete with the attendant emotional and instrumental affectations the mainstream market demands. As a result, producer **Lars Stalfors**, the man behind the boards for albums by Cold War Kids and Matt & Kim, gives the group free rein, and while initial tracks "Intro (Funeral) Parade," "29," "Run or Hide" and "Can't Come Down" happily shimmer and soar, the rest of the album increasingly settles for a less distinctive, more contrived series of musical clichés. Final tracks "Winter Wind" and "David Robinson" attempt to salvage the proceedings with an emotional crescendo, but the lyric that accompanies the earlier "Ghost" becomes sadly prophetic: "Can't nobody hear me/ Is anybody listening?" ***Lee Zimmerman***

Sean Watkins
What to Fear
SINGLE LOCK/THIRTY TIGERS

Sara Watkins
Young in All the Wrong Ways
NEW WEST

Siblings **Sean** and **Sara Watkins** each cast a knowing glance with separate solo albums that survey the usual spectrum of emotion and insight. Having worked both together—in the bands Nickel Creek, WPA, the Watson Family Hour and in supporting roles for others—and on their own, the Watkins' latest projects offer impressive additions to their respective résumés. Sean's *What to Fear* is a homespun set of songs that capture a singular sensory experience. The album art visualizes the idyllic imagery that's reflected in Watkins' tender trappings, much like the glow of a campfire that slowly succumbs to the flames' final embers. "Last Time for Everything," "Back on My Feet" and the title track are the most memorable of that lot, but when "Keep Your Promises II" and "Too Little Too Late" offer final flourishes, the music soars to even higher heights. Drummer **Matt Chamberlain**, **Petra Haden**, **Benmont Tench** and sister Sara all assist with the proceedings, but it's also clear that Watkins has found a quiet resolve that's well within his reach.

Sara, on the other hand, tends to be a bit more emphatic, even though there are several songs on her solo release that are also intimate and endearing. The tender, yearning title track, the pretty yet pensive "Like New Year's Day" and the steady, pleading "Move Me" (in which she tells a would-be paramour: "I want you to love me") find her expressing herself with unmistakable clarity and purpose. That assertive stance is especially evident in the numbers where she adopts a full-on country caress—the uptempo "The Love That Got Away" and the spunky showstopper "The Truth Won't Set Us Free," in particular. Those songs offer proof that, here, she's found her footing—in this case, as a down-home chanteuse who's capable of mixing sass with sentiment. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Greyhounds
Change of Pace ARDENT

The Texas-based duo of **Anthony Farrell** and **Andrew Trube** were steady members of JJ Grey & Mofro before deciding to focus on their own eclectic funk-and-soul outfit **Greyhounds**, whose third album, *Change of Pace*, couldn't have a more fitting title. In what tends to sound like at least two albums stitched together, *Pace* displays the duo's ability to expertly mesh Farrell's rich keyboards with Trube's blues-fueled guitar, while, at the same time, switching from the former's deep, soulful vocals to the latter's more straightforward, mid-range singing style, each song bringing another facet to the group's sonic texture. The album opens with "Devil's Eyes," a funky, percussive tune sung by Trube that is quickly contrasted by Farrell's "Walls," a Bill Withers-meets-Marvin Gaye public service announcement. Tracks like that one and "Before BP (The War Is on for Your Mind)" reinforce a socially conscious streak in the duo, with Farrell delivering lyrics like, "The ass and the elephant have become irrelevant/ The dollar's the only vote that counts." It's not all seriousness with these guys, though, as illustrated by the following song, "Late Night Slice," which seems to be Trube's tongue-in-cheek attempt at semi-comedic romancing. ***Matt Inman***

The Low Anthem

The Low Anthem
Eyeland WASHINGTON SQUARE

Five years between albums is a long delay for a band that has only been around for a decade. When we last heard from Rhode Island's **The Low Anthem** in 2011, they had just released *Smart Flesh*, an album that bathed the band's relatively straightforward indie-folk in a swirling pool of ethereality and spacey reverb, giving their music—which utilized a host of standard and offbeat instruments—a richness and depth lacking before. For the self-produced *Eyeland*, The Low Anthem dive deeper into that primordial pool. This time, the new lineup of **Jeff Prystowsky**, **Ben Knox Miller**, **Florence Wallis** and **Bryan Minto** recorded in their own Eyeland Studios, took a leisurely and quizzical approach, playing with all of the technology at their disposal to ornament and finesse the tracks at hand. The result is a crowded album, but none of that piling on of sounds is superfluous or pretentious. While the stories are often impenetrable (a sample from opener "In Eyeland": "In the dens of the body, her fleshy red treasure, what cannibals crave, what scientists measured, all you could feel may be all that you ever are, no one here believed in suicide," etc.), each track feels wholly engulfing, a complete, self-contained experience as well as a cog in something greater. Even more than *Smart Flesh*, *Eyeland* is a recording meant to grab control of your senses. Let it, and then let it again and again. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Jake Bugg
On My One ISLAND

"Gimme the Love," an unabashedly stomping single, is enough to convince you that **Jake Bugg**'s third album, *On My One*, will be a success. It's not all brash rockers, though: The British singer-songwriter, whose last effort, *Shangri La*, dropped in 2013 to sizable acclaim, explores a wide variety of tones on the songs here. Acoustic opener "On My One" is an emotive ballad where Bugg mourns his current state, crooning, "I had my dreams/ but in this world they're gone." He finds similar introspective emotion elsewhere, particularly on dejected weeper "The Love We're Hoping For" and folksy number "All That," which allow Bugg to highlight the powerful moan of his voice. But he's best on those aforementioned stompers. "Bitter Salt" is a boisterous rock song with an earworm of a chorus, and "Put Out the Fire" amps up Bugg's acoustic guitar riffs into a bluesy whirl. Although the songs may sound disparate, they aren't. Bugg himself is the center point, with each track revealing a new and different facet of his emotional status. He sounds a little dissatisfied—or maybe just searching—but that discontent is working for him. ***Emily Zemler***

Anat Fort Trio with Gianluigi Trovesi
Birdwatching ECM

In the July 28, 1962 issue of *Saturday Review*, acclaimed author Ralph Ellison drew upon the correlation between jazz and ornithology in his famous think piece, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz," on Robert George Reisner's then-new biography *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker*. Over a half-century later, Israeli jazz pianist **Anat Fort** continues to keep this tradition alive with the title of her excellent third album for ECM. Joining Fort on the wire is her longtime rhythm section of double bassist **Gary Wang** and drummer **Roland Schneider** as well as Italian reedist **Gianluigi Trovesi** on alto clarinet. Fort returned to Tel Aviv after living in Brooklyn for a good portion of the 21st century, and the beauty of *Birdwatching* is in the convergence of Fort and Trovesi's Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures during tracks like "Earth Talks," "It's Your Song" and "Inner Voices." Throughout, their conversations are tempered by the lucid production of ECM founder **Manfred Eicher**. It's a beautiful combination of styles that fill the room like the aromas from a fresh-air food market, becoming a distinctively singular entity once it all hits the same atmosphere. And, like the recreational activity it's named after, the joy of *Birdwatching* is all in observing the quiet magic in action. ***Ron Hart***

Nite Jewel
Liquid Cool GLORIETTE

Ramona Gonzalez began the **Nite Jewel** project as a trend-seeking college student, stockpiling indistinct electro-R&B onto an eight-track. But she achieved hi-fi self-actualization with 2012's *One Second of Love*, which

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Reviews

melded chillwave ambience with funk rhythms and sophisti-pop strangeness. Gonzalez seemed emboldened by the thrill of exploring in a proper studio, as she rummaged gleefully through sonic styles. Now, with her frustrating third LP, *Liquid Cool*, she returns to the murk mill, churning out dead-eyed synth-pop that resembles Janet Jackson fronting a gothic-pop band in the afterlife. Gonzalez spent the past four years toiling over her new direction—a head-scratching timeline since these four-note synth-bass patterns and static drum programming feel like the products of a single 3 a.m. doodle session. On *One Second of Love*, Gonzalez contorted her voice with soulful melisma and subtle twang—here, navigating the numb hooks of "Boo Hoo" and "Over the Weekend," she's smothered in reverb goop. She breaks free from that eternal slumber on the seductive "Kiss the Screen," crooning in clear, pinched tones over choral winds. It's a rare gush of angst on an album defined by the icy monotony its title suggests.
Ryan Reed

Alexis Taylor
Piano MOSHI MOSHI

When he isn't twiddling synth knobs with alt-dance act Hot Chip, **Alexis Taylor** spends his downtime crafting polarizing solo albums—from the insular bedroom patchworks of *Await Barbarians* to the jazzy avant-rock of side project About Group. Freed from the commercial expectations of his main band, he's pushed his songwriting boundaries—with mixed results. But the fumbling around, rather than the end product, feels like the objective. The literally titled *Piano* finds Taylor flexing his crooner muscles, singing in hushed tones about familiar topics—romantic tranquility, internal peace—over sparse keys that fumble toward the next chord. He aimed to create an "atheist's gospel album," and the mood sticks. On soulful cuts like "I'm Ready" and "Lonely Vagabond," he conjures the eerie yet sublime atmosphere of an empty church, with a nervous choir accompanist warming up before Sunday mass. Taylor strikes the deepest nerve with gospel standard "Crying in the Chapel," popularized by Elvis Presley in the mid-'60s. "The tears I shed were tears of joy," he proclaims, his voice fluttering. "I know the meaning of contentment." One line later, he name-drops "the Lord," but the point is moot. *Piano* is a secular hymnal that only a sinner could praise.
Ryan Reed

Deakin
Sleep Cycle MY ANIMAL HOME

Across the protracted, seven-year buildup to **Deakin**'s debut solo LP, Animal Collective's most elusive member launched a controversial Kickstarter campaign, journeyed to Mali and battled crippling self-doubt over his musical path. He should have trusted his instincts: *Sleep Cycle* is the warmest, most human release from camp AnCo since the ambient acid rock of 2005's *Feels*. Indeed, these six tunes play like lost relics from his main band, discovered accidentally on a hard drive after a decade. "Just Am" finds Deakin "standing in the desert," his unassuming voice crossing over sand dunes built of electric-guitar buzz and flickering piano. "Footy," a psychedelic nightmare bordering on free jazz, is anchored by a boyish vocal melody that recalls his buddy Avey Tare. Deakin has always operated in the Animal Collective shadows, performing on select LPs and rarely earning the acclaim of his bandmates. But *Sleep Cycle*'s hypnotic textures underscore his importance to their approach. More impressive are the moments of differentiation: "Golden Chords," with its double-tracked acoustic fingerpicking and after-midnight crooning, wouldn't sound out of place on the new M. Ward album. Deakin took his sweet time with self-discovery, but the wait was worth it. ***Ryan Reed***

Marissa Nadler
Strangers SACRED BONES

It's doubtful that **Marissa Nadler** ever sought to make her case for being America's answer to Kate Bush, but that's because she doesn't have to—her music does it for her. Gifted with a mesmeric voice, a lyrical palette flecked with Plath and Poe, and a knack for writing mod-gothic melodies that linger like a forest mist before dawn, she manages to transform heartbreak and alienation into a perpetual state of bliss. *Strangers*, her second album with producer **Randall Dunn** (Earth, Wolves in the Throne Room, Black Mountain), expands on 2014's starkly acoustic *July* with a more assertive backing band and an oceanic gyre of sound. From the spectral "Katie I Know," with strings by **Eyvind Kang** (and a mood that harnesses the same creepiness of Portishead's second album), to the majestic "Janie in Love," with its apocalyptic refrain of "You touch and the earth will crumble/ You speak in hurricanes," Nadler moves beyond the personal to a more all-enveloping vision. It's not an easy journey—Dunn's production creates a haunting distance, reminiscent of Fred Foster's work with Roy Orbison, that can leave you clawing for a way into Nadler's world, but maybe that's the point. We're all strangers until we do the work to know what's real.
Bill Murphy

DJ Shadow
The Mountain Will Fall MASS APPEAL

Twenty years ago, turntablism innovator **DJ Shadow** released *Endtroducing*, an album that revolutionized the concept of beat-making—his multilayered soul style inspiring everyone from Radiohead to Four Tet to Diplo to Prefuse 73 to the current Brainfeeder/Low End Theory movement in Los Angeles. His career nearly derailed following an ill-advised foray into Oakland hip-hop's short-lived "hyphy" scene on 2006's *The Outsider* and the cameo overkill of 2011's wildly uneven *The Less You Know, The Better*, but Shadow triumphantly returns to his original recipe on the excellent *The Mountain Will Fall*. His first for the Nas-backed Mass Appeal label, these 12 new compositions don't merely mirror the glory of their iconic predecessor. Rather, the man, born **Josh Davis**, utilizes his past to launch a new means of beat-building, one rooted in an intrinsic fusion of live instrumentation and sampled sounds and yielding such hypnotic science as "Depth Charge" and "Suicide Pact." Meanwhile,

Mountain is a brief but brilliantly curated elite force of acts representing the best of their crafts, from rap (a never-better **Run the Jewels** on "Nobody Speak"), experimental classical (pianist **Nils Frahm** on "Bergschrund") and progressive U.K. jazz (Manchester trumpet great **Matthew Halsall** on "Ashes to Oceans"). Throne reclaimed. ***Ron Hart***

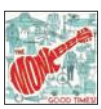
Psychic Ills

Inner Journey Out SACRED BONES

Tres Warren is so spaced-out on **Psychic Ills**' fifth LP that he can barely sing more than two notes in sequence. Or maybe he just doesn't want to. *Inner Journey Out* blurs the fine line between drone and snooze, and that ratio is fairly even. The album opens with the beachy atmosphere of "Back to You," with acoustic strums and Farfisa organ interrupted by Warren's sub-Dylan snarl. Elsewhere, generic blues-rock ("Mixed Up Mind") and drowsy country-psych ("I Don't Mind," featuring duet vocals with **Hope Sandoval** continue that bored pace, redeemed only by cameos of steel guitar and harmonized electric leads. (Warren's lyrics are equally nondescript: "Don't know if I can be there every day/ Don't know if I can be there for you," he sings on "Another Change." "And I don't know if you want me to stay/ Don't know what you want me to do." Got it!) Stick around long enough and *Inner Journey Out* lives up to its cosmic title: Jazzy psych instrumental "Ra Wah Wah," the epic centerpiece, stretches out to nine minutes with rippling chimes and smooth sax textures. Psychic Ills have impeccable taste—but this time, the songs themselves rarely rise to similar heights. ***Ryan Reed***

The Monkees

Good Times! RHINO



Fifty years after the debut of their trailblazing TV sitcom—and make no mistake, it *was* trailblazing—the surviving **Monkees** (**Davy Jones** died in 2012) have come up with their first new album since 1996's disappointing *Justus*. It's by far the most fully realized and satisfying project to surface under this brand since the '60s. All four members are represented on the **Adam Schlesinger**-produced set, including Jones, whose comforting voice powers the cheery Neil Diamond-penned "Love to Love." **Peter Tork**, **Micky Dolenz** and **Michael Nesmith** contribute original material (the latter's delicate, austere ballad "I Know What I Know" is superb) but several of the album's highlights arrive courtesy of big-name fans like XTC's Andy Partridge ("You Bring the Summer" is sunny-pop nirvana), Weezer's Rivers Cuomo, Death Cab for Cutie's Ben Gibbard and the unexpected team of Noel Gallagher and Paul Weller, whose trippy "Birth of an Accidental Hipster" would fit cozily on albums by either one. Old-timers are on board, too—the driving title track, written by the late **Harry Nilsson**, features his original guide vocal in tandem with that of Dolenz, who remains one of rock's most underappreciated singers. And Gerry Goffin and Carole King's "Wasn't Born to Follow," so wistful when cut by The Byrds, is pure, modern Americana here. Hey, hey. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Beth Orton

Kidsticks ANTI-

When she got her start back in the early '90s, **Beth Orton** broke through as a diva-worthy ingénue in the mold of Tracey Thorn or Liz Fraser; her work with producers William Orbit and Andrew Weatherall accentuated her breathy mid-range, which was perfectly suited to the tranced-out electronica sound that had the U.K. all abuzz. Predictably, her fans found her growing interest in acoustic guitar and her gradual turn toward folk influences, beginning with 2002's *Daybreaker* and followed by *Comfort of Strangers*, to be a bit of a head-scratcher (both albums, it should be noted, merit profound rediscoveries), but *Kidsticks* ought to settle the score. With beat-maker and rave-ologist **Andrew Hung** at the controls, Orton sounds positively ionized, from the floor-shaking opener "Snow" to the infectious bubblegum bounce of "1973" and the achingly beautiful "Flesh and Blood," while the dubstep-style synth drops that underpin "Petals" add a hint of rueful menace as she intones, mantra-like, "My tears well up and cry for you," just before the distorted guitar and drums come crashing in. Some might call it a triumphant comeback; the truth is, she never left. ***Bill Murphy***

The Ragbirds

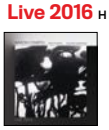
The Threshold & The Hearth

ROCK RIDGE

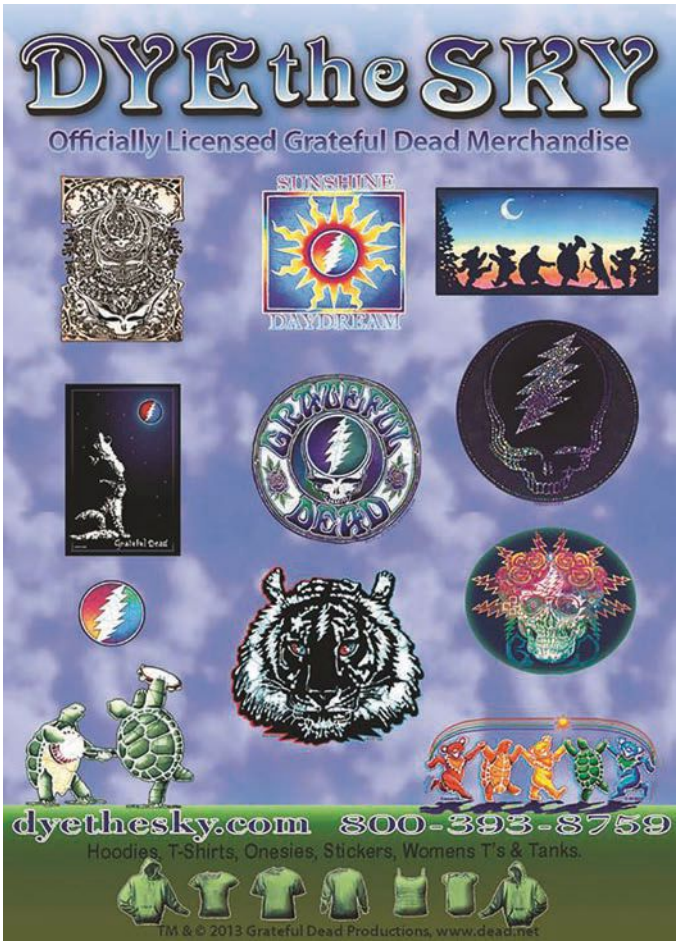
It's been four years since Michigan quintet **The Ragbirds** released a studio album, which was full of feel-good pop and global folk. All that's still there on *The Threshold & The Hearth*, but the carefree, wayfaring narrator has given way to—as the name suggests—someone more focused on cultivating a home. Frontwoman **Erin Zindle** and drummer **Randall Moore** recently had a child, so that's part of it—the album tells the fictional story of two lovers who fall hard and spend decades dealing with all that it entails. "Bottomless Heart" hits the apex of that all-consuming love, while the next track, "Sometimes Honestly," ups the ante, with Zindle's fiddle-playing mimicking the give-and-take relationships demand. The more mellow "On Your Side" lays out the coming to terms that accompanies the years with solid advice: "This is not the movie of your life." Zindle's voice is high and dreamlike, complemented by a rhythm section that's consistently groovy, whether the song's influence is African ("The Curse of Finger Pointing") or Cajun ("Little Ties"). The 13 tracks are especially worldly for an album focused on the domestic, but then this is a band of gypsies, able to steal from a culture while making it wholly their own. ***Kiran Herbert***

Aaron Comess

Live 2016 HEY BOY/INNSBRUCK



Whether as the drummer of the Spin Doctors, as a sideman (a function he's served for dozens of diverse artists) or leading his own bands, **Aaron Comess** is an ever-reliable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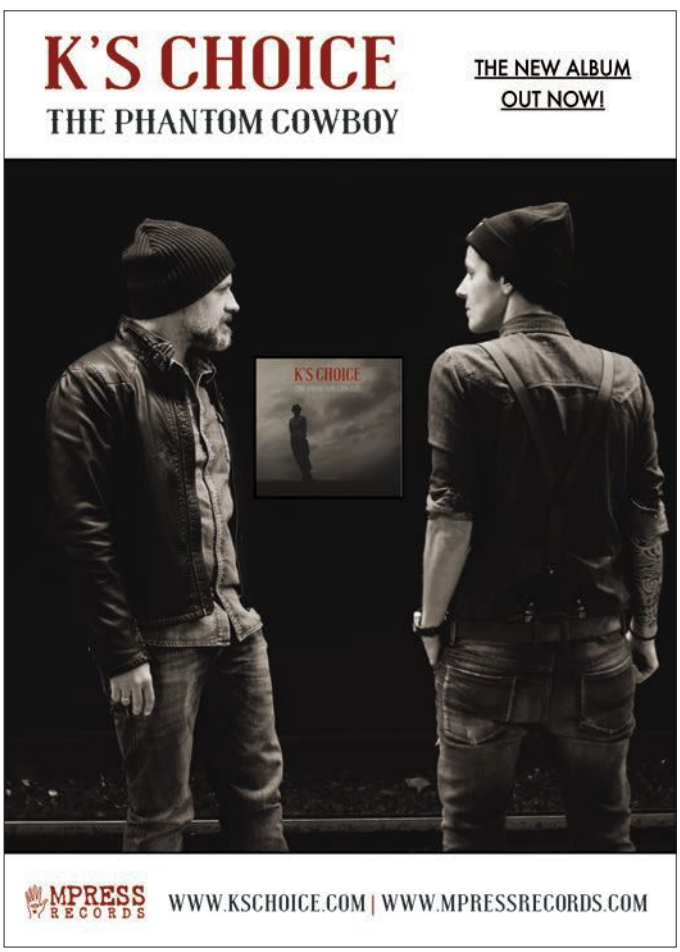

rhythm machine—in the pocket and relentlessly creative. And, as a composer, he draws on his all-inclusive musical instincts, putting his ingenuity and skills to effective use. It all comes together particularly well on this live set with his new setup, featuring guitarist **Teddy Kumpel** and bassist **Richard Hammond**. On the surface, they're an archetypal power trio—hard, tough and persistent—but dig down a bit and the nuances quickly make their presence known. Comess and company owe much of their sensibility to classic jazz fusion as well—their all-instrumental excursions are intricate but never meander. There's always a direction, peaks and valleys, and nothing is wasted. "Past Present Future" is a gem: Kumpel's licks are muscular but fluid; the rhythm section craftily keeps the guitarist rooted within the song's prescribed structure but don't hold back, a level of adroitness most jambands only dream about. On other tracks, they may slow things down ("Beautiful Mistake," "Kumpalicious") or go all-in on the heavy ("Gorilla," "Dirt") but never do they bog down in their own virtuosity; for all of their prowess, Comess, Kumpel and Hammond always keep their eye on the prize, their musicality.

Jeff Tamarkin

Plundering The Vaults

Phish

9.14.99 Boise State University Pavilion, Boise, ID LIVEPHISH

A welcome new soundboard captures **Phish** as the musicians enter the last year of their first era. Recorded on Sept. 14, 1999 in Boise, Idaho, LivePhish's latest presents a 27-minute "AC/DC Bag,"one of the quartet's all-time open-ended improvisations, though nothing else quite hits that level of inspiration. On display is a version of Phish in the process of transforming into a legacy act, less focused on highlighting new batches of material each year than rearranging the songbook just so. Little in the first set stands out (or channels Phish's singular weird) save for a dynamic early version of "What's the Use?," an atmospheric improvisation from the then-new *Siket Disc* that transformed into a performable composition. Following the first offering of Frank Zappa's "Peaches en Regalia" in over two years—a version that probably wouldn't make the nitpicky Zappa proud—the 13-year-old "AC/DC Bag" is the reason for this release's existence. The song's jam finds new territory in the blink of a third ear, a textured modal space out beyond the era's space-funk and the song's usual boundaries, with guitarist **Trey Anastasio** eventually creating keyboard loops and an excellent example of drummer **Jon Fishman** engaging his vacuum for textured, non-goofy sound-making. It lends a glow to the rest of the set, including a luminescent "Simple" encore that brings the night to a gentle landing.

Jesse Jarnow

My Morning Jacket

It Still Moves (Deluxe Reissue) ATO

My Morning Jacket's first two albums teased their Southern psych-rock greatness, but the Kentucky warriors realized their true identity with 2003's *It Still Moves*. **Jim James**' powerhouse voice—smothered in grain silo reverb, building from stoned coo to pained roar—developed into an instrument of singular yearning, and the revved-up engine of new drummer **Patrick Hallahan** propelled the songs to dynamic new heights. Despite the creative leap, James was never satisfied with the album's original, muddled mix, which they finished under the pressure of looming tour dates. Thirteen years later, iconic engineer **Bob Ludwig** has remixed and remastered the classic LP, offering vast and instantly noticeable improvements. While the band's trademark reverb remains intact, Ludwig adds depth and clarity to every instrument—check the boosted electric guitars on "Mahgeetah" and "Dancefloors" or the extra thump to **Tom Blankenship**'s bass on barnburner "One Big Holiday." While *It Still Moves*' ghostly atmosphere became an essential part of the album's initial mystery, this new mix feels more vital and immediate, offering an attack that better resembles the band's walloping live show. A second disc of unreleased tracks and intimate demos fills out a more complete picture of the sessions. It's hard to believe twangy "That's Too Bad" and lush "En La Ceremony"—fleshed out with new overdubs from current members **Carl Broemel** and **Bo Koster**—have been collecting hard drive dust all these years. Over a decade after *It Still Moves*, My Morning Jacket have evolved into a multifaceted sonic beast, but they've arguably never sounded more themselves than they do here.

Ryan Reed

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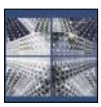
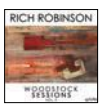




The re-release of **Rich Robinson**'s first four solo albums shows that when freed from The Black Crowes, the guitarist not only allows himself to pursue his muse, but also to take it in whatever direction it leads him. While 2004's *Paper* could be considered less of a leap, especially since it emulates the Crowes in its rockier entries, Robinson's willingness to tamper with the template made typecasting exceedingly more difficult. *Through a Crooked Sun* followed seven years later and found Robinson vetting his love for the Allman Brothers and some vintage backwoods basics, while also leaving ample room for sweeping instrumentals that took him into fusion-esque terrain. Later that year, he detoured entirely on the limited edition EP *Llama Blues*, maintaining internal consistency through four original songs based entirely on the blues. It was then left to 2014's *Woodstock Sessions*, recorded electrically and acoustically before an intimate audience, to sum up those earlier efforts, tossing in a stirring cover of Derek & the Dominos' "Got to Get Better in a Little While" for good measure. Bonus tracks grace all but the EP and find a seamless fit, especially on *Paper*, which was reconfigured entirely after its masters were damaged during Hurricane Sandy. Changes included, these albums now find a well-deserved return.

Lee Zimmerman

John Mayall's Bluesbreakers

Live in 1967 – Volume Two
FORTY BELOW

When we reviewed the first volume of this long-lost set of vintage British blues, we weren't very charitable regarding the audio quality, but noted that "what you've got here is worth hearing anyway," due to its historic nature. That same analysis applies to the second volume, recorded at four different London locations in the spring of 1967. "What you've got here," to repeat, is **John Mayall**, **Peter Green**, **Mick Fleetwood** and **John McVie**, before the latter three broke off to form some little blues outfit of their own called Fleetwood Mac. Let's also reiterate that those scared off by subpar fidelity should steer far clear of this one too: These recordings were made on a one-channel reel-to-reel tape recorder, and the instruments and voices are often distant and abrasive, with little separation or dynamics. It's a mess, basically. But when Green peels out one exquisite lick after another on B.B. King's "Sweet Little Angel," or roughs it up in collusion with Mayall's organ and the rhythm section on his own "Greeny," it's impossible not to get caught up in the excitement that must have permeated The Marquee Club and Klook's Kleek. Mayall, who contributes a trio of original tunes, is at the peak of his vocal powers on tracks like J.B. Lenoir's "Talk to Your Daughter" and Otis Rush's "Double Trouble." Would it be nice to be able to hear it better? Of course, but sometimes you take what you can get. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Gov't Mule

The Tel-Star Sessions EVIL TEEN

In 1994, a year before their self-titled debut and just two months after their first show, the original **Gov't Mule**–**Warren Haynes**, **Allen Woody** and **Matt Abts**–entered Tel-Star Studios in Bradenton, Fla. What do the demos for one of the rawest power-trio albums since the '70s sound like? Exactly how you would imagine.

The band had just come off an intensive week writing and jamming at The Big House in Macon, Ga.'s, the very same room where the original Allman Brothers Band had rehearsed from 1970-73. They were solidifying a focused, cohesive sound, as can be heard on the newly released *The Tel-Star Sessions*, and to which anyone lucky enough to see an early Mule show can attest.

The songs–two-thirds of which would appear on *Gov't Mule*–are heavy but buoyed by a sense of mischievous fun. The three instruments share the spotlight, with Woody unleashing a low, fuzzy, rumbling bass that's as integral as Haynes' guitar. It's fascinating to hear early takes of epochal Mule songs like "Left Coast Groovies," "Rocking Horse" and "Blind Man in the Dark," but the material stands on its own, and the two songs they never cut in the studio again–Willie Dixon's "The Same Thing" and ZZ Top's "Just Got Paid"–also sparkle with a stoner, proto-metal vision of the blues.

Haynes and Woody were fulfilling their shared vision of resurrecting the sparse, heavy freedom of classic power trios like the Jimi Hendrix Experience, Cream and Mountain. Five years into helping revitalize the Allman Brothers Band, they were looking to make their own statement and get their ya-yas out. They did exactly that, with a freedom and friskiness that can only come from serving no other masters. *The Tel-Star Sessions* is a vital reminder of just how audacious Gov't Mule was at its inception. ***Alan Paul***

Lizzy Mercier Descloux

Mambo Nassau
Zulu Rock
One for the Soul
Suspense LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

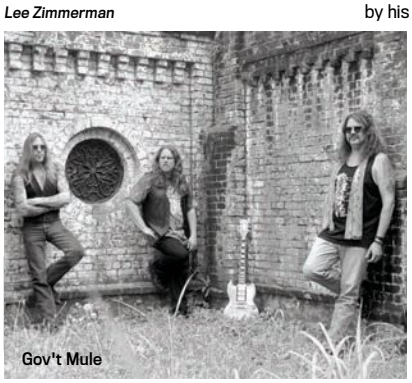
Back in the late '70s, Parisian expat and singer-songwriter **Lizzie Mercier Descloux** was ready to make a meal out of downtown New York, and not just because she was a hungry artist. With the city's factionalized jazz, punk and dance scenes beginning to bleed into the underground "no wave" movement, Descloux was perfectly positioned to stake her claim as a punk-funk diva on the rise; besides having already secured her bona fides by publishing her first book of poems, *Desiderata* (with input from Richard Hell and Patti Smith), she was shacked up with record producer Michel Esteban, who eventually co-founded ZE Records in 1978 with Michael Zilkha and executive-produced Descloux's first album, *Press Color*. Descloux wasn't a shrinking violet, though. Hell described her as "carnivore and prey in one," and it comes through in her music–angular, uncompromising, vulnerable and take-charge all at once. In a series of deluxe reissues, lovingly annotated by rock journalist **Vivien Goldman**, Light in the Attic has rolled out the four albums LMD made in the '80s, and it's a surprisingly daunting body of work. Surprising, because although some of Descloux's music is cemented in its time (consider drummer **Billy Perry**'s electronic Syndrum sound on 1981's *Mambo Nassau*), she was still more than adept at channeling the future. It helped to have topflight musicians in the studio with her, but you can hear prescient tastes of second-gen ska in *Zulu Rock*, the acrobatic vocal moves of Merrill Garbus (aka tUnE-yArDs) in the hopped-up worldbeat of *One for the Soul*, and Peter Gabriel's still-nascent Real World label in songs like "Once Upon a Time Out," from 1988's *Suspense*–LMD's last album before she retired to Corsica, where she died of cancer in 2004. ***Bill Murphy***

The Highwaymen

Live – American Outlaws LEGACY

While **The Highwaymen**'s genesis coincided with 1976's *Outlaws* album, their three successive collaborations barely gained a passing glance. Consequently, *American Outlaws* is as much an obit as it is an overdue offering from an honest-to-god country supergroup that now finds two members sadly departed (**Waylon Jennings** and **Johnny Cash**), one in decline (**Kris Kristofferson**) and a fourth (**Willie Nelson**) still braving the road at age 83. Each boasted their own pedigrees, but this brisk four-disc collection–three CDs and a Blu-ray taken from concerts at Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, N.Y., in 1990 and two consecutive Farm Aid benefits in '92 and '93–captures the quartet at the peak of their prowess. There's a wealth of hits–and subtle humor–found in these seamless renditions of individual classics ("Mammas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys," "Good Hearted Woman," "I Still Miss Someone," "A Boy Named Sue," "On the Road Again," et al.), which makes this set all but essential for any Americana aficionado. Indeed, *American Outlaws* raises the bar–perhaps literally as well as figuratively–and ought to give today's feisty alt-country insurgents a second thought on how best to blend song and swagger.

Lee Zimmerman


Gov't Mule

Fleetwood Mac

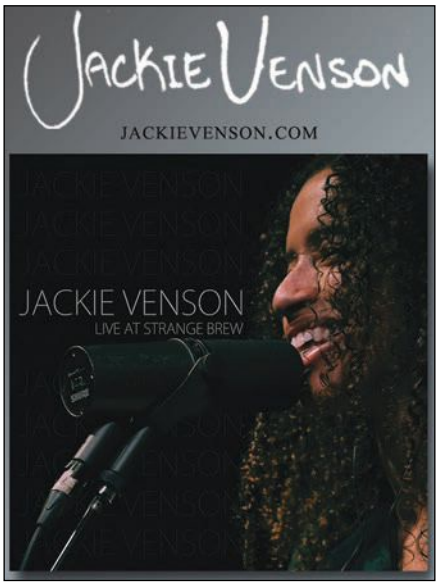
Mirage (Reissue) WARNER BROS.

Fleetwood Mac revisited their hit-making *Rumours* formula with 1982's *Mirage*, shaking off the warts-and-all experimentation of double-LP *Tusk*. Working again under the direction of guitarist **Lindsey Buckingham**, the quintet embraced the neon decade's slick production values, adding an unforeseen sheen to anthems like **Stevie Nicks**' chiming "Gypsy" and **Christine McVie**'s soulful "Love in Store." Over three decades later, *Mirage* remains inevitably overshadowed by the band's herculean '70s efforts–but it's time to reassess this oft-ignored LP. Warner's remastered reissue fleshes out the album with a full disc of B-sides and rare tracks. Most intriguing are the early/alternate versions, full of wildly different overdubs and arrangement choices: A messy "Book of Love" includes an extra–if faint–Nicks vocal and what sounds like an accordion wheeze; "Eyes of the World" features complex vocal counterpoint in place of the finished version's baroque guitar. Only completists should bother with the expansive deluxe version, which boasts a third disc of 1982 live tracks. It's charming to hear Buckingham scream his head off on a bluesy "Not That Funny," but sloppy renditions of the *Mirage* material bog down the set. Like most reissues, this one's a scattershot affair–but, unlike most, it reveals new depths to an underrated near-classic. ***Ryan Reed***

John Coltrane

The Atlantic Years – In Mono RHINO

The early 1960s was a creative, prolific and defining period for **John Coltrane**. This six-album set–in hear-all mono–finds Coltrane exploring and reinventing the blues, hard bop and progressive jazz, while gently stretching into free-jazz territory, walking the tightrope of creative desire but never getting "too out there." *Giant Steps* (1960) reveals a plethora of new possibilities. The fittingly titled album finds the preeminent saxophonist doing summersaults over classic jazz patterns–a glimpse of future directions–while on *Bags & Trane* (1961), Coltrane's post-bebop runs contrast perfectly against **Milt Jackson**'s vibes. At a time when many jazz artists were exploring samba, *Ole Coltrane* (1962) offers a fresh, Latin-influenced approach, a musical vision more akin to a piercing bullfight. Yet, there's a deeper, more spiritual side to this sax master, evidenced by his longing (at times painful) solos throughout *Coltrane Plays the Blues* (1962), while 1966's *The Avant-Garde*, featuring trumpeter **Don Cherry**, seeks enlightenment and awakening through abstract passages and sonic outbursts. *The Coltrane Legacy* (1970) adds a selection of then-previously unreleased material culled from the original sessions. This beautifully mastered 180-gram album set reveals a man ever-searching, reaching beyond perceived musical barriers toward that eventual "greatest` ever" designation. Start your Coltrane exploration here. ***Glenn BurnSilver***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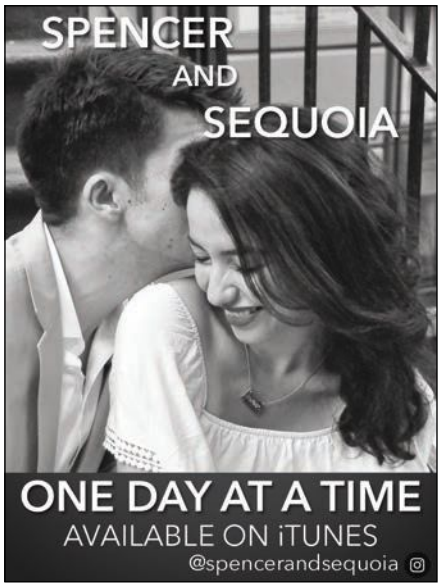
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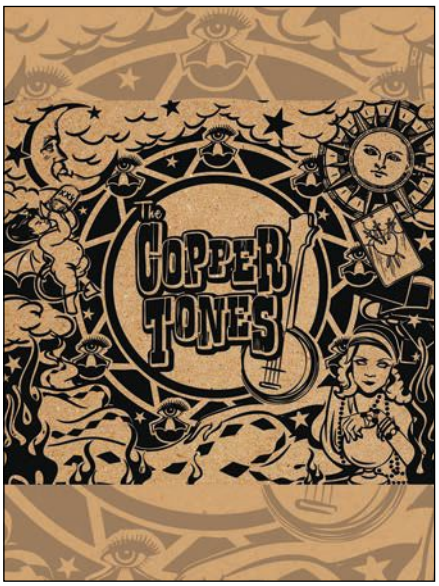
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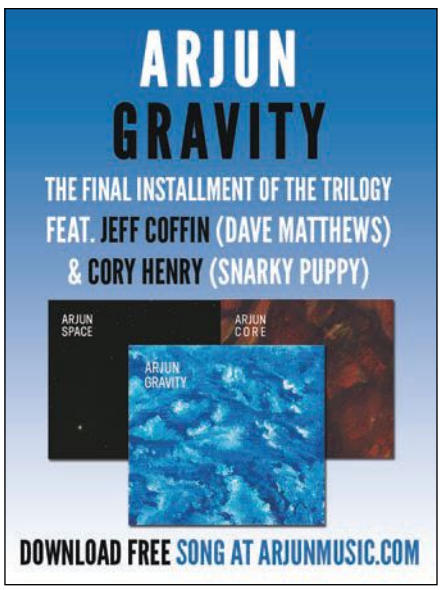
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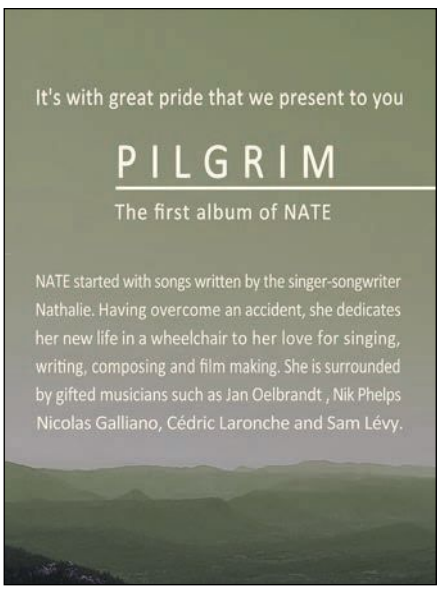
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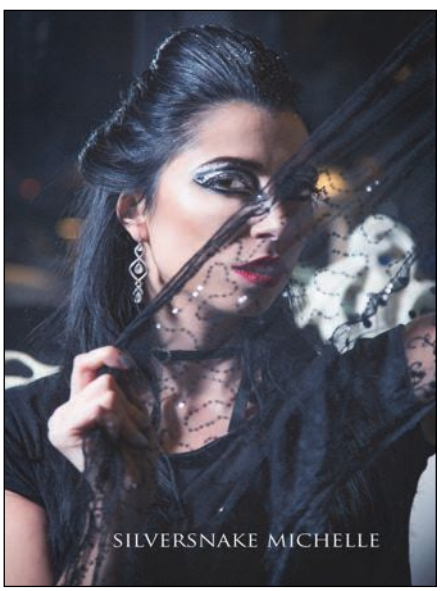
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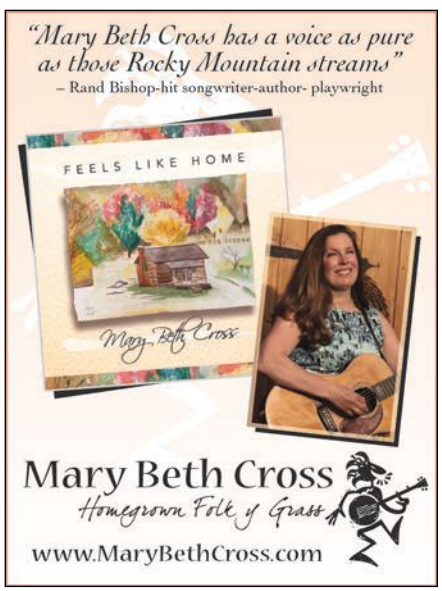
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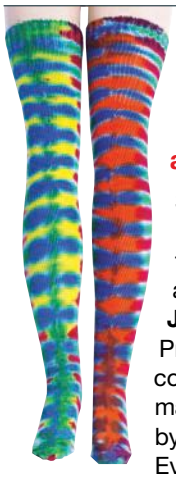

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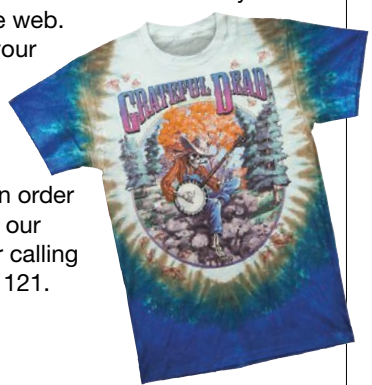

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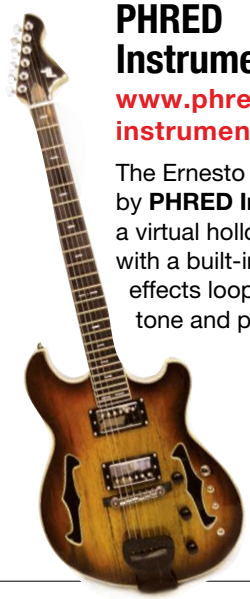

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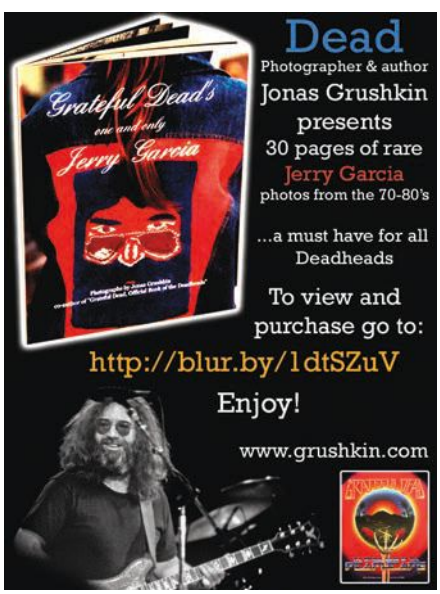

are sitting out there." And I was like, "OK, I'll take them." I gave her my credit card number and that was it.

I never asked what time the show was, so, of course, we missed the whole first set. We got there at the break and those were the best seats I had ever had. I grew up going to Merriweather, and I had never been so close to the stage. And, because we had these promoter tickets from the band, we were sitting in the middle of all of the promoter's friends and all of the band's friends. After the show, they said, "Hey, the Allman Brothers are having a party. Do you guys want to come?" We were 22 and had never been backstage before. That's where we met [Allen] Woody and Warren, and we became friends.

We went to Philly the next week and hung out with them a little bit, and we started our relationship later that summer. In September, they came to New York and did five nights at the Beacon Theatre, and we got to spend a couple of weeks together. That's when we got together, so I've been with Warren pretty much my whole adult life.

What were those final few Allman Brothers Band shows at the Beacon like for you, in October of 2014?

It was all bittersweet for me. Some of the greatest experiences and times of my life have been with the Brothers on the road—at shows—especially when I was young. Being on such big tours and getting to learn everything from real pros was really great. I got to sit next to Tom Dowd, one of the great producers/engineers, during their recording sessions, so I got to learn from some of the best. The run was bittersweet because I didn't want them to stop playing. I love the Allman Brothers musically, and I love them personally. They were always one of my favorite bands, but stopping seemed right to the guys—in terms of their own careers—and they wanted to make sure that the band went out at the top of their game. I understand that. The mindset was: "Let's go out on top as good as we ever were, ever. We're playing the best we can play, and before anything affects that, let's do it." I think if you asked them, they'd all say it was the right decision. But, I miss the Allman Brothers as a fan.

One personal memory of the run took place at the very end. The band and the whole organization around them were so focused on the shows and the music and not getting weighed down by the heaviness of it all that no one really thought about what happens when the final note ends, so there was no after-show party or plan. The morning of the final show, Warren and I decided we wanted to have a party where the band, the crew and their friends could gather in a real low-key manner to have some food and just hang out together. It took a lot of scrambling, but we called up a restaurant near the Beacon that we had gone to a bunch during each year's run and asked if we could have the after party there. So everyone made their way over there and we were able to decompress from what was an amazing musical night, but also a pretty emotionally intense one. Mind you, the show didn't end until well after 1 a.m. Eight hours before, there was nothing planned, but all the band members wound up coming and hanging out together which was nice.

From your perspective as a manager or as a host on Jam On, what do you look forward to most when you go home after a tour or just when a night is over?

That's funny. Warren and I talk about this all the time because our son Hudson is super musical, but it's not like we're playing music at home all the time. We both like to read. I like to do mind-numbing things—I don't want to get too deep. Warren likes to watch a lot of the political shows. I personally like to just sit on the couch and play games on my iPad and watch *Law & Order*, something very lowbrow. We're so busy. We live in Westchester [County, N.Y.], and I go to a trainer in the morning before I drive to the city. I do my show at night and I do any type of redos or liners for the radio show in the morning before I leave. It's a long day. For the most part, unless we have a show to go to or some event, we like to keep it low-key at home.

What's the best and worst part of your job as a manager?

The best part is that I get to make records and book live tours, and go on the road and see bands and hear music, and hear these records that we've worked on and work with these amazing artists. I learn something all the time because the really great artists are all super smart—they're all brilliant types. A lot of the guys I work with—like Warren, Krasno and this new kid Marcus King—are geniuses in my mind and being able to work with them is amazing. It keeps you on your toes. I don't slack because I can't; I don't have time to slack.

The worst part is probably just being where the buck stops. When things go wrong, I'm the person who has to deal with the record labels or promoters who aren't happy about something. I have to step up and take responsibility for it. I think a lot of people might say, "Oh, dealing with crazy artists..." With all that talent comes a personality. They are who they are.

"I knew that I was going to like whatever they sent me," she continues. "They were really cool, like, 'You can do whatever you want with it—change it up, whatever you want to.' I loved the simplicity and sweetness of it, and I didn't really change anything. I just sang it the way Travis did on the demo. It was a pretty quick turnaround—I probably listened to the song 10 times or something, then wrote out the lyrics, tried to get my head around it. I was thinking about Travis and his wife when I sang it—they have such a cool relationship."

Working with Bluhm also opened up another door for the Dusters: collaborating with indie-folk hero Ryan Adams. The singer-songwriter became a Bluhm fan via The Gramblers' popular YouTube series the "Van Sessions," in which the band covers classic pop/rock tracks (everything from the Grateful Dead to Hall & Oates) while hauling down the road on tour.

"[Adams] was one of the people who participated in the tweeting frenzy," Bluhm says. "That was such a cool experience. Everyone from Cameron Crowe to Bette Midler to John Oates to Ryan Adams—the range of people those Van Sessions affected was pretty remarkable. That's how he discovered me and The Gramblers. I first knew of Ryan because I was really into *Waiting for Guffman* and *Best in Show*, all those Christopher Guest movies, and I adore Parker Posey. I was looking her up years ago, and that's how I stumbled upon Ryan's music. [*Ed. Note:* Posey and Adams were a high-profile couple for several years.] A friend of mine gave me [Adams' 2007 LP] *Easy Tiger*, and I fell in love with it.

"We were in each other's social orbs, and we were keeping track of each other's careers peripherally," she continues. "It just sort of happened. We were put in touch, and we started talking about music. He had some shows that he was supposed to play solo and said, 'Do you know a bluegrass band?' He knew I was out with the Dusters—we'd become friends. He was like, 'Do you think the Dusters and you would be down to back me?'"

In June, the seven-piece supergroup united at Colorado's Telluride Bluegrass Festival—after squeezing in only two rehearsals, one of which took place the day of the show—performing both Adams material and left-field covers, including a haunting version of Dio's metal anthem "Holy Diver." ("He just threw that on us at rehearsal—nobody knew that until the day before," Bluhm admits. "I went and looked up the Dio version and was like, 'Oh, my God, that's so crazy. The fact that he can have an ear for a song like that and make it completely his own, that's so rad.") The chemistry was so immediate that Adams asked the band to join him at his next few solo engagements, including a set at the Newport Folk Festival, one headlining date and a spot on *The Late Show*. Stretching perceived notions of what bluegrass instruments are capable of, their stop at Port Chester, N.Y.'s Capitol Theatre included Slayer and Black Sabbath covers.

"We are all fans of Ryan, so it's very exciting to play that music," Falco adds, seemingly amazed at the snowballing speed of their collaboration. "It's incredible to play with a once-in-a-generation type of artist. Just being able to be around somebody with such talent—hopefully it'll rub off a little bit."

The humility of that last comment is telling. Ten years deep, the Dusters have broadened both the mass appeal and sophistication of their music, soaking in influence from unexpected sources. Falco and company are willing to share the stage or studio with anyone—an indie hero, a country legend, an emerging soul singer—who might help them develop as musicians.

"We're constantly trying to evolve," he says, "being open, allowing the music and the band to take a life of its own."

The Infamous Stringdusters with Adams and Bluhm, Newport, R.I, 7/30/16.

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standoffish asshole before. Now, I notice, when we play shows at the same places where Against Me! played before, things are much...happier. Everyone had a good time at the show; it's a positive environment."

Jonah Bayer, former *Alternative Press* editor and co-host of the *Going Off Track* podcast, has covered Against Me! since its inception. "I interviewed Tom a bunch of times but, honestly, I didn't know him super well. He was a little standoffish and hard for me to read. But Laura is much more outgoing and secure. I would even call her a friend."

Another journalist, who wants to remain nameless, agrees. "I interviewed Tom Gabel for the release of *Searching for a Former Clarity*, the closest thing this generation will ever get to The Clash's *Sandinista*. I prefer to hang out with Laura Jane Grace."

It would be wrong to infer that Laura Jane Grace has lost all her bite and it's been all sunshine, roses and free-flowing good vibes since her transition. In September 2014, when the musician learned that former AM drummer Jay Weinberg was the new Slipknot drummer, she took to Twitter @LauraJaneGrace and shot off a short and not-so-sweet tweet: "Dear Slipknot, good luck with that. #shitbag."

While the former Tom Gabel left some wreckage in his wake, such as the time he was arrested for assaulting a barista in Tallahassee, Fla., fans are more likely to approach Laura Jane, as if she was a familiar soap star. On a Reddit interview, one fan commented: "My wife and I are enormous fans, and since she isn't a 'redditor,' she wanted me to ask: 'Have you considered bangs?'"

Grace treated that question as seriously as inquiries about the preponderance of death imagery in *Transgender Dysphoria Blues*. "Ha! Lately I've been having trouble at shows. I'll go to start singing and suck hair down my throat and start choking. So, yes, I have thought about bangs."

But, apparently, that hasn't happened yet. During her show at last year's Reading, she performed the entire 45-minute set with her long tangle of sea-witch curls completely in her face, never once attempting to push them aside. It felt more metaphoric than cosmetic.

"I don't know everything, but I am far beyond where I was before," Grace reflects. "I spent a lot of time in Japan writing this last record, and the Japanese have a phrase that says, 'People have three faces: The face you see, the face someone else sees and the face that there really is.'"

She just might not be ready to show that one yet. But she's getting close.

eared jamband festival circuit and a few key indie-rock promoters for booking her fiery, high-energy show when few others would. In particular, she considers her appearance with Phish during their 2009 Halloween Festival 8 event as a turning point. "I didn't know who they were," she says of the appearance, during which the group covered The Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main Street*. "I picked up so many fans being at that Phish concert. The same when we were with Tedeschi Trucks Band." She hopes *Miss Sharon Jones!* will have a similar effect.

* * *

WHEN SHE HASN'T BEEN TOURING THIS YEAR, Jones has spent considerable time receiving cancer treatments in Upstate New York. She thinks of 2014's *Give the People What They Want*—which was recorded and shelved while Jones recovered the first time, then released when she returned to the road—as the most direct manifestation of how her disease has shaped her music. She says the album's key track, "Get Up and Get Out," took on a different meaning.

"It just came to me one night while I was on the stage," Jones says. "When I was in the hospital, I kept saying, 'Cancer, you get up and get out.' I've always had the shouting thing in my work—that's part of my repertoire. I'll let you know the lungs are the best part; I get to show people the energy I have and how much I love doing that by shouting. We changed the music to capture that resilience."

She continues to own her style physically, too, performing without a wig even though she has lost her hair. That prize-fighter mentality remains; the fierce determination in her eyes matches her powerful R&B belt and small frame.

Longtime Daptone MC and guitarist Binky Griptite doesn't shy away from mentioning her age or disease when introducing her onstage, either. Other reminders are slightly more veiled. Jones flashes back to her struggle every time she sees the video for the *Give the People What They Want* song "Stranger to My Happiness." "All those months I was down and out, I didn't listen to any music," Jones says. "'No one knows the pain I went through to get that video—in between each take, I had to sit down and cover up. I think about how that video went to my fans and they saw that I'm OK."

Kopple sees that true connection to her fans as part of Jones' true, higher calling. "There's a scene [in *Miss Sharon Jones!*] when she goes into tears wishing that her mother could be there and how her mother supported her and said, 'Listen, you're this beautiful, young, gorgeous woman. You have been given this phenomenal gift—use it,'" she says. "She just wants people to know who she really is."

to go out to camp in the desert a lot when I was a kid. We'd go to bluegrass festivals, which are out there in Nevada, Arizona or parts of eastern California. There's a great expanse to this flat desert that is near and dear to my heart—like the ocean—because you are completely exposed. It's a little of a "come-to-Jesus moment" in terms of the fact that it's you and the world and you're so close to the sky, and there's a little bit of a "you-and-the-universe" feel.

I had this accidental habit that formed on New Year's Day. I stayed over at someone's house after a party, and I woke up at around 5 a.m. and just decided to leave. I got up and, instead of going home, I drove east and I went out to the desert. No one was on the road and it became this thing that I did a few years in a row.

But, I think the bigger picture is that when you go out there, you think about the times you've had and the memories of everything. Immediately, you realize that you aren't that person anymore, but the desert felt like this monument for a lot of things that mattered to me, and it was just this beautiful renewing moment I had on New Year's Day. The song is about remembering that specific habit and about other things that seem to be monumental in our own minds or anchoring points in our lives that are good to come back to.

SAY SO

"Say So" started because I was really frustrated with a friend who was battling addiction. Here I was in the midst of writing an album to spur myself out of these ruts, and I really wanted to see that from my friend as well. It was frustrating to realize that you can't make that decision for other people. "Say So" is trying to at least get the ball rolling.

I have the vision in my mind of a movie that probably exists where there's a man and a woman standing on a cliff or on the edge of a building, and the guy says to the lady, "Do you trust me?" And she's like, "What?" Then he says, "Do you trust me?" And you can see that she does not trust him. Then she finally says, "Yes, I trust you," and, in saying so, she decides that she does trust him. The power of words, the power of what comes out of your mouth, is a tiny covenant that we have with ourselves and with those around us.

In that moment, I was just thinking a lot about the importance of words. I was thinking that maybe if my friend just says that they're trying or that they're not going to do it, maybe that will be the first step to turning their life around.

WITHOUT A WORD

"Without a Word" is the last song that I wrote for the album. I started writing it on tour, which is rare for me. I was singing into my phone quietly as my bandmates were driving along, having a conversation. I wrote a couple of verses, just a little speck, and it just sat there until I came home from touring. Then I played it for Gabe and he really liked it and thought it was worth finishing, so I invited him over to help me. We were in the front yard and he played some beautiful chord changes on the guitar that elevated it. I went into my house after he left and started some more specific visuals.

I had this idea of everything being fine and in order, in a house, and you're just sitting on the couch and then, all of a sudden, someone busts through the door like the Tasmanian Devil—spins around like the cartoon and trashes the joint. Then he busts out through the window, runs down the street and it's as if he was never there, besides all the devastation, but no one else saw it. It's almost like it didn't happen, except for this huge mess you have to deal with.

I remember finishing it and thinking, "Where did that come from?" I had just finished reading *The Great Gatsby*, and I think that may have resonated in a way I hadn't really noticed because it seemed to fit in with what was going on.

THE TRUTH WON'T SET US FREE

"The Truth Won't Set Us Free" is the second-to-last song I wrote for the album. I wrote it because I had spent about a week on tour in the U.K. with the Transatlantic Sessions, in which American musicians and musicians from the U.K. get together and find common ground. Rodney Crowell was also a part of it. I had never really spent so much time around Rodney before, and he makes an impression—he has this great stride when he walks onstage and he has really great pacing to his stories. Driving down the road, we would hear a lot of stories and he would sing these beautiful country songs. When I came home, all I wanted to hear were two-step shuffles, so I wrote one.

I want to face issues that are uncomfortable. I want to make bold decisions that are truthful to me now, not who I was five or 10 years ago. "The Truth Won't Set Us Free" is the opposite of that: You can't really change where you are, you can't be a different person. Don't even acknowledge that there's more out there, because you can't see it. It's a little bit fatalistic, but I believe that a lot of people feel that way. There are many ways to handle life, and that song is trying to be a silly way of saying, "Well, screw it. What am I gonna do? I'm here." If there's a pessimistic song on the album, it's that one, but I try to make it fairly lighthearted.

INVISIBLE

"Invisible" is about trying to be OK. It's really the moment of starting over. That's the song where a lot of the things I have been talking about really come down to a point. I was walking the dog and I just started crying. I realized I had to reconsider a lot of things in my life. I had to start over and be OK with breaking up from some of the fundamental things I had held on to. Some of these things are spiritual issues and some are just things that have become default beliefs culturally or socially.

In realizing that I needed to start over, I also realized what I needed to reach toward. It can be very uncomfortable to do that. It's about invisible things, figuring out what this great in-between is. It's different for everybody, finding who they are with respect to intangible things: love, relationships, certain truths. This song is me trying to give myself the freedom to reach toward things and not, by default, "holding on to not let go." I feel like that line is what the rest of the song expands on.

TENDERHEARTED

"Tenderhearted" was inspired by two particular women in my life. My grandma would give these great, great hugs, and she was one of those people that, no matter what was happening in your life, you knew that she loved you, and that would just be everything. She went through so much in her life to get to that point. This song is about how kind people aren't just kind, and big-hearted people aren't just big-hearted. They've generally been put through the mill and somehow processed life in this beautiful, loving, positive way.

It's not an easy process to get to that point where you have all this love and kindness. We don't all quite come by that very naturally. There's another woman I was inspired by who has this life where she has had so much loss and has gone through so much, yet nothing comes out of her except giving. The fact that she has seen so many things in this world only adds to what she can give to you because she has an incredible ability to process hardship and tragedy. It ends up coming out in a way that shines like gold. There aren't a lot of people like that in this world, but I'm lucky enough to know a few of them.

Norah Jones

BY DEAN BUDNICK

ON NORAH Jones' new album, *Day Breaks*, she revisits her formative years as a Texas high school and college jazz pianist. The album originated with her participation in The Kennedy Center's Blue Note at 75 concert in 2014 and features Dr. Lonnie Smith, whom she met that night, as well as three musicians she performed with at the event: Wayne Shorter, John Patitucci and Brian Blade. (Blade also played drums on Jones' career-making 2002 debut, *Come Away With Me.)* "After that night, I thought it'd be fun to make a real jazz record," she explains. "I've never really done that. I didn't just want to make a standards record, though, so I started writing songs for this record here and there. It became less of a jazz record than I had intended, but I feel like it all fits together really well."

What was your initial takeaway from the Kennedy Center event?

It was just an awesome night. I realized how much I love playing with Brian Blade and how much I worship Wayne Shorter. It was fun and there was a sense of community, too—seeing all of these people who I really hadn't seen in a long time. I'm not really on the jazz scene anymore. I went to jazz camp in high school with Robert Glasper, so hanging with him was nice. It was like old times—Jason Moran is from Houston. It felt like a little bit of a homecoming—just hanging with all those people. We all love Bruce Lundvall, he really *was* the label for the last 25 years. [Lundvall, the longtime Blue Note president, died in 2015.]

Who were your inspirations on piano back in your jazz-camp days?

Growing up, it was definitely a lot of jazz piano players like Bill Evans, but I've also been listening to Ray Charles on the record player since I was a little kid. Aretha Franklin's piano playing was always pretty inspirational. Also Nina Simone—I'm not even talking about them because they're singer-pianists. I'm talking about their actual piano playing. I also grew up listening to *Red Headed Stranger* [Willie Nelson's 1975 album] with Bobbie Nelson on the piano—that inspired me, too. A combination of all those, plus a ton of great jazz pianists: Bill Evans, Herbie [Hancock], Wynton Kelly.

Did you make a conscious decision to veer off in a slightly different musical direction?

It kind of just happened. I moved to New York [in 1999] to play jazz. I was playing all these jazz standards in college and high school. When I moved to New York, I got into this songwriting scene. I had these friends—Jesse Harris, Richie Julian—and they were writing songs, and I started writing my own songs more on guitar because I didn't have a piano yet. It just opened me up to that world, which opened me up to not staying within a genre. A good song is a good song; it doesn't matter what genre it is. It only matters if you connect with it and can deliver it in a way that is meaningful.

In the context of this record, you've mentioned Shirley Horn and Blossom Dearie.

The first time I heard Shirley Horn was in college and somebody gave me that album *You Won't Forget Me*, which came out in the '90s. Then, I got into her older stuff, like *Travelin' Light*. I love that album—great pianist, great singer. She had a real way of just playing as slow as she could, and her band always followed her. It was just heart-stopping. Sometimes, when you get the right chemistry with a slow, slow song, it's amazing.

Blossom Dearie is another great singer-pianist who had a way with a slow song. She had a lot of cutesy songs—she's got that cutesy voice—and she had a lot of cuter songs that were faster. But my favorite stuff by Blossom Dearie was the slow stuff, like "Tea for Two"—it's the most beautiful, slow version. Or "I'll Take Manhattan"—that's the stuff that inspired me.

Dr. Lonnie Smith adds Hammond B-3 to *Day Breaks*, and you play it a bit as well.

He cracks me up; he's the funniest human. He sounded so great that night and we had such fun talking backstage that I thought I'd ask him to play on it. He just put out a new album and sat in with The Roots on Fallon. It was cool to see him out there. It's been awesome hearing organ players like him.

The organ has been sounding so good to me lately—what an interesting instrument and it's got such a vibe. As a piano player, though, it's kind of a beast. I had my organ player show me some stuff with the drawbars, and he told me: "It's really not that hard, you just have to experiment a little bit." I'm not great at it, but it's pretty fun.

This was your second time recording with Wayne Shorter.

I sang with him for the first time 10 years ago on a Herbie Hancock record [*River: The Joni Letters*]. It was Herbie and Wayne and David Holland. I thought, "Oh, crap, I'm playing with these guys who I've listened to for so long—these guys who are such heavy musicians!" I was singing a song by Joni Mitchell ["Court and Spark"], who also is one of the most complex songwriters. I was terrified of how it was going to work—"Am I going to be able to hang with these guys?" We recorded it all live and it was super fun, and I think it came out great.

I felt the same way when Wayne came in the studio, although I'm more confident now. I played piano—I thought I should since it's my record. I really enjoy it. So I basically hired his quartet without Danilo Pérez, who is an amazing piano player. We were playing mostly ballads, so I had time to find my way. It was a little nerve-wracking at first, but it worked out. He's such a generous musician and a kind, fun person to be with in the studio.

How has the New York that you first encountered in 1999 changed over the years?

It's changed a lot, for sure. Everybody's moved to Brooklyn, and Brooklyn is now too expensive for any artist to live in. But my life has changed, too. I have two kids; I don't go out every night, which is what I did when I was in my twenties. I went out to hear music every night or I went out to eat or went to do something fun or cool. Even though I don't do that, I think that stuff still goes on. It's just that the neighborhoods where it goes on have moved.

Danny Clinch

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